

**PETER
PIPER**

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Peter Piper

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PETER PIPER

BOOK ONE—THE BOY, PETER

CHAPTER I

Piper's Pretty Boy

PETER PIPER, you are seventeen and three-quarter years old. You're not a kid any more, and your old diary is full, and you've got a talkative mood on, so, while you're starting on a new blank book, you might just as well give an account of yourself. I suppose anyone else would think it funny to write everything that happens down as I do, but I guess if they hadn't got anyone to talk to from one year's end to the other, except father and Dick, they'd just long to have a real old yarn with someone now and again. Ever since I was fifteen I've done it. I don't really keep a proper diary; I scarcely ever date things, and sometimes I don't put anything down for a couple of months if things are too dull and uninteresting.

I started because I did want sometimes so dreadfully to talk to another girl. I'm a girl, you know, and so I pretended this book was one too—my greatest friend. I call her Di—short for diary, but it might just as well be Diana—and since of course no one ever sees it but me, I tell her everything I do or think or read. I used to tell her lots about books and the people in them once, but now I think a lot more about myself. I suppose it is because I am growing old. I never used to think there was anything funny about me, or wonder why I was different

from other girls—at least I suppose I'm different; I'm not like girls I read about in books, anyway—I never knew a live one.

There are a few girls at East Magnet, where we go for our mail and stores, but I have only seen them from horse-back. I have talked to the girl at Mason's store, but she is a vulgar little piece, and made eyes at me. I kissed her once across the counter to see what she would do, and she slapped my cheek and laughed; but she was pleased. If I were a girl I would not let a stranger kiss me. Of course I am a girl, but nobody knows it. Everyone thinks I am a boy. I have never worn girls' clothes in my life. I don't know why; I never thought about it till lately. It was just me, same as living away in the bush by ourselves was me. I suppose father dressed me as a boy at first because he could manage it better than girl's things. You see, my mother died when I was born, and afterwards I just went on wearing them.

They're lots more comfortable, I'm sure; besides, I could never ride in skirts. I wonder what I really look like to a stranger. People often stare at me when I go into the township. The girl at the store told me they call me "Piper's pretty boy." But I can ride better than any of them for miles around all the same, and they know it. They had races at Lennville last month, and father let me go with Dick, for a wonder, and I won the hurdles. Phew! it was a scamper, but it was fun. I lost my hat, and I was scarlet; and when the judge gave the prize to "Mr. Piper" I nearly died laughing at the sudden queerness of the situation. I'm used to being just "Peter," of course; but "Mr. Piper" sounded so funny. I looked at Dick, and he was grinning like a hyena. Some ladies came up and talked to us—real ladies, and they made us go and have lunch in their tent, and they had champagne, and they laughed and talked and betted, and I was the shyest, silliest, stuck pig on the face of the earth. I didn't mind the men, but there were girls there; and somehow their pretty frocks and silk

stockings and truck made me feel a fool. My hands seemed like elephant's feet, and I got in everybody's way. There was one girl there called Marion, who was so pretty, she reminded me of the girl at the store. She made eyes at the men too, only she did it more slyly. I suppose that is what makes the difference between them, because she was a lady, and all the men were paying her compliments. I hated her all of a sudden; I wished I had frills too, and that the men would look at me like they did at her.

She would talk to me too—I suppose because I didn't speak to her, only stared. I suppose she thought I admired her but was too shy to say so, and of course I could have got some fun out of it if I hadn't been silly; but Dick grinned so I couldn't get a word out, and once, when he winked, I blushed outright. I suppose it was a blush—I'd never done it before, but I got burning hot; I felt as if my face would scorch the Marion girl as she leant over me. She was saying: "How is it I've never seen you before, Mr. Piper? Don't you care for dances and parties? We have such jolly ones at Lennville."

"I don't know," I blurted out. "I've never been to any," and I got up and walked away. I suppose it must have been an awful thing to do, for everyone looked a bit surprised, and one man whistled softly under his breath.

"Pretty cub!" he said to another man as I made for the door; and as I fled outside I heard Dick say in an explanatory sort of way to Mrs. Delmar, the fat woman who seemed to own the place, "Peter's not used to girls."

I wouldn't go back; I just knocked about on my own till Dick was ready to go home. He roared over the affair as we cantered back, but after a while he frowned, and said seriously: "Look here, Peter, this is getting over the fence. You're nearly eighteen now; your father ought to send you away to Perth or Melbourne for a bit. I shall just speak to him myself about it."

"Yes, you're likely to," I jeered. "Bet you a level sov. you haven't the pluck." But in a way I almost

wish he dared. I should like to see something besides bush. Not that I don't love it—I do, I do! every bit of it. The big, blue-black skies at night, like ball dresses that I read about in the papers sometimes, with the stars sewn on for spangles, and the white gums like shiny skeletons seeming to wave you back with a mysterious warning when you go outside. And then the goldness and gaiety of it all in the sun! But I like the nights best; it seems so much easier to think at night. I think a lot now.

But I haven't described myself yet. Now, Di, here's an old hand-mirror. I'll tell you just what I'm like. I'm fairly tall and slim, my eyes are a no-colour sort of grey, and my lashes are long and black, and make my eyes look as if they were black too—but they're not. My face and arms are tanned by the sun, and the bridge of my nose is just powdered with freckles, and where my shirt opens my neck is brown too, but the rest of me is white enough. My hair is cut short, and it is a mass of tiny little curls, wee frizzly ones; I expect I'd look like a negress if I let it grow long, but perhaps if I did it would not curl so hard. And I don't look so bad even dressed as a man, especially in my working clothes—that is, a blue shirt and buff trousers and leggings.

I've lived here always, as far as I know. I can't remember anything else or anybody but father and old Fran. Fran does the odd jobs about the place and most of the cooking. I don't know whether there were ever other people here or not, because you can't ask father questions—he only told me to hold my tongue or mind my own business the few times I have tried—and Fran doesn't know anything to tell; he says I was about two years old when he came, and there was no one here then.

I don't know anything about my mother; father gets in a rage when I mention her—I wonder why? Did he love her so much that he wants to forget about her, or was he cruel to her and does the thought of her reproach him? I should think it was that, myself, because sometimes he

starts telling me about her without my prompting him, as if he were sort of lashing himself into a rage. I don't believe he could have loved her a bit because he always has a nasty sneering little laugh when he speaks of her. Perhaps he married her for her money, and then found it was settled on her so that he couldn't touch it, and they separated. Perhaps she isn't dead at all—but she must be, or surely she wouldn't ever have left me with him. I'd never leave a baby of mine to a man, if he was its father forty-six times over.

Our house must have been a nice one, although it is not big ; it is built mostly of galvanised iron and wood, but the walls are all neatly boarded inside and there are some beautiful pictures hanging on them. There's a veranda running round on three sides too, though I expect it to topple down any day. It's just alive with white ants ; they've got at the flooring, too, and you have to be awfully careful where you tread in some places or you'd go through. It's all untidy-looking, like the picture I once saw of a girl's bedroom, in a magazine, where she had been dressing for a dance ; but it's not such a pretty untidiness as that. I suppose it wants a woman to look after it ; perhaps it was gay once, when my mother was alive. I read in a book once that houses have souls ; ours hasn't, it's dead, it's like a middle-aged frump who has lost all care about her appearance.

I usedn't to think about it once, I was always outside riding ; I only came in to eat and sleep, and often I used to sleep out in the bush if I was too far away to come home ; but now it sort of worries me. I wish I knew how to make it look nice, though what's the use anyway ? —there's no one to see it if I did. There's no one lives near us except Dick. We only see drivers going through and prospectors and sundowners ; and sometimes, but not often, father talks to men in East Magnet, but no one ever comes to see us but Dick.

Dick is my pal ; he's got a station about ten miles away from us. He knows I'm a girl, of course. I just

loved his father ; I called him " Dad " as well as Dick ; he used to be so good to me. And old Emma, the woman who keeps house for them, would make us cakes and sweets ; and Dad Harcourt would give Dick and me lessons in the evening, and tell us about all the famous men in history, and all the good and beautiful women, and sometimes he told us about the bad ones too. He said I ought to know, because one day I would be beautiful and the lovelier a woman was the better God meant her to be, otherwise she made beasts of men. But father says there is no God.

He sent Dick to college in Adelaide when he was thirteen, and then, because I missed him so dreadfully, Dad Harcourt was sweeter to me than ever. He used to give me lessons every afternoon, and that is why I know a good deal, even if I have never been to school like other girls. I know some geography and whole lots of history, I love reading about battles, and even a bit of geology ; and I can crochet too—I saw directions how to do it a couple of months ago in one of the magazines Dick lent me (he gets lots of books and papers sent up from Perth every month), and I've made some such pretty mats—only I don't know what to do with them now that they are made. I didn't tell Dick I had, though ; he'd laugh. He's got a big square jaw and heaps of freckles ; and we're awfully fond of each other, but we've taken to quarrelling lately sometimes. I suppose it's because I'm a woman and not a real boy. I don't think he's very polite to me sometimes ; he doesn't talk to me, anyway, like men do to girls in books, but perhaps they behave differently in real life. I wish I could see real live people. I feel like the " Lady of Shalott " ; I'm sick of shadows, I'm tired of the looking-glass ; I want to meet real girls and men—men who will make love to me. I want to be made love to, and I want to be kissed. There !

I don't care if it is shameless and bold and worse than the girl at the store—I want just to see what it's like. So now you know the sort of girl you're talking to, Di,

are you horribly shocked ? But I've never seen anything, anything at all, and I can't help being human, can I, Di dear ? And I've never been kissed in all my life. Perhaps there isn't any romance in the world really outside story-books ; father says there isn't, but I should like to pretend for a while there was. How dreadful this looks written, and yet it isn't more awful to write it than just think it, is it ? I didn't know I thought it, even, at least not as bad as all that, till I started to write, and then my vague crossness seemed to gather to a head and burst all over the paper.

What really upset me is, Dick said to-day while we were yarding some sheep that he was going to sell out and go to one of the Eastern States. I expected it in a way, for he has been restless ever since Dad Harcourt died, and I suppose it is even worse for him than it is for me, he having seen a different life, but all the same it makes me feel bad. It's rotten enough with Dick, but without him—I can't bear it. I shall clear out, too. I must be of some use in the world, only when you've never seen any of it the prospect of facing it on your own is a bit scarey. But one thing is settled : live here alone after Dick's gone I won't ; and I shall tell father so, if I can screw up my courage ; but stay I will not, as sure as my name's Peter P——. But is it, now ? It can't be, of course ; I wonder what it is ? Perhaps it's Marjorie, or Eileen, or Beatrice—these are my favourite names ; perhaps it's Bridget—I'd sooner have Peter than that.

The other night I said, " Father, haven't I got another name besides Peter ? "

" No," father said shortly.

" But I wasn't christened Peter," I objected.

" You weren't christened at all," he said ; " don't ask questions."

" But," I persisted, wondering at my own daring. " I must have a sensible name ; every child has a name."

" Not some," father replied grimly.

He put down his book and looked at me between his

half-shut eyes in a way that made me feel horrid: "Why?" was all he said.

"Well," I said, "you're my father, aren't you? And so I suppose——"

Father laughed in his nasty way. "And so——" he echoed. "Your father," he added over his shoulder as he left the room, "if it comforts you to know, was reckoned a most honourable man."

Of course father always is queer, but, *Di*, wasn't it a funny thing to say?

CHAPTER II

Peter's Birthday

It's January now, three whole months since I have had a talk to you, Di, and I'm eighteen. It is my birthday to-day—not that father ever takes any notice of it, but Fran always gives me a present; the darling swears off drink for a whole week beforehand in order to get enough to buy me something decent. I believe that's what reminds father of it, for he usually gives me some money, although he never wishes me a long and prosperous life, like Fran does. Sometimes I think father hates me; I believe I must remind him of my mother—perhaps I have her mannerisms. Yesterday when he was talking to me I started to chew my little finger—I often do it when I'm thinking, I don't know why—but father said: "Don't do that!" so suddenly that I jumped. He added after a minute, "It's babyish"; but you could see that was an afterthought.

I've been out riding. It was a great afternoon. Coming home the gums threw big interlacing shadows across the track, and Nugget picked his way among them as daintily as if he were a cat on a velvet pile carpet.

I wonder if Dick will remember it's my birthday; he generally does. Last one he gave me a glorious gun; it cost him seven guineas, I know, because I accidentally saw the bill. It's a real beauty. I suppose it's rather hard to know what to give me, one wants so few things up here.

Do you know what I often think I'd like to do, Di? In the magazines there are always advertisements of face-creams and powders and scent. I'd like to send some money down and buy some. I wonder if they'd improve my skin.

The advertisements say even the worst will yield to steady treatment; and mine is so brown, it must look queer with my grey eyes. But there's no one to see if I did improve it—Dick would only laugh.

It's so funny—Fran always gives me girl-presents. I've got a whole lot of scent-bottles and pin-trays and stuff he's given me; but last birthday was the limit. The poor dear had been rigorously sober as per usual all the week, and he couldn't hang out any longer (usually he has a bust-up the day after the gay event), but this time as soon as he got to East Magnet he made a bee-line for the pub. And when he was simply rolling in his saddle he went to Mason's store to get me a present. We examined it together the next day, and neither of us could make out what it was. It was very pretty, a long box, looked as if it was made of crocodile skin, but Fran said he guessed it was only pressed paper, and it had all sorts of turquois stones stuck round it. We both admired it, but neither of us had the ghost of an idea what it was for. But next week when I was talking to Mason's girl I saw another, something like it, on the counter, so I said carelessly—
“What's that?”

“That!” the girl said, grinning like a cat. “Oh, that's a glove box.”

“But what's the use of it?” I said.

“To put your gloves in when you're not wearing them,” she said. “Want to give me one?”

I stared at her for half a second, and then some miners who were leaning against the counter at the other end talking to old Mason laughed, and one called out: “She's cornered you, Piper; you'll have to pay.” So I did, but I think it was disgusting. Do all girls ask men as shamelessly for things they want? Father says no woman knows what decency means; and the funny part was, the girl beamed and rolled her eyes at me after as if she thought she'd done a great stroke.

Fran and I've just been watching the sun go down on my birthday; it was like a lump of liver, red and

nasty, dripping on to the horizon, and the clouds around it were smoky like the flame of a sulphur candle. The trees were so still you could *hear* them, and when a mopok called out we both started, it sounded so witch-like. Fran was smoking, sitting on a bucket, and I was lying on the earth, which was still warm. I like the smell of the earth and the touch of her on the back of my neck, she makes me drowsy and peaceful-feeling. It seems when you curl up in her nice old lap as if millions of invisible hands were patting and cuddling you in nice and warm, and little chirpy crickets seem to grumble all sorts of incomprehensible jokes in your ear.

Fran's face was all red from the sky glow ; his scarred old features—his nose is quite flat, and he's only got one eye—looked just like Satan's in the illustrated "Paradise Lost," that Dad Harcourt had. Fran's a Portuguese, and he used to be a prizefighter in Melbourne till he got knocked out ; then he drifted up to Magnet like so many others do. The people are always shifting here—prospectors, drovers, storekeepers, they splash into the quiet pool of our lives and then drift away, leaving only a ripple of memory behind that soon gets lost in the deadly flatness of it all.

I wish that I could slide away and see the world beyond ; it looks as if I'm fixed here for good and all. I wonder why father never leaves the place ; perhaps he's a criminal and is dodging the police. That's the likeliest explanation after all. I wonder why I never thought of it before. How exciting ! Perhaps some day a trooper will ride up here and arrest him in the King's name, and then I suppose Fran and I would have to play bushrangers and rescue him on the way to jail. The pistol Dick gave me would come in handy then ; only I never will be able to shoot straight—at least, Dick says I won't. But I'm not really as stupid as he makes me out, though I must admit I'm better with a gun. Dick is a pig not to have come over to-day ; I suppose he has forgotten. Just wait till I see him, and I'll tell him what I think about it. Per-

haps he's writing to that silly old girl of his in Adelaide, Marjorie what's-her-name. Whatever Dick can see in her beats me ; her photo's sort of pretty, I grant, but she looks as empty as a walnut-shell. Dick used to be sweet on her when he was over at the 'Varsity there, and they still write. I'd like Dick to marry a nice girl, not a feather-headed frivol ; not that I want him to marry anybody—I shall be horribly jealous of her, even if she is an angel, I suppose because Dick's the only pal I've got. If I were an ordinary girl and had heaps of men nice to me I don't suppose I would mind so much. I do wish I had. I wish someone would fall in love with me just to see what it's like.

I wonder if I wore frocks and did my hair like the fashion plates whether Dick would love me instead of Marjorie. When I was riding with him yesterday I couldn't help noticing how brown and hard his cheek was, and I wondered what it would feel like against mine. Oh ! I am an ass ; whatever would Dick have thought of me if he had guessed my thoughts ? Stop being a fool, Peter. But I am a girl, hang it all, and I can't help thinking a little bit about things other girls do. I'd like to see what they're like, just for fun. Fat chance I've got of doing it up here. I never meet a decent man, and if I did he wouldn't be likely to fall in love with a girl with short hair and trousers.

I want to get away, anywhere. I believe, after all, Dick must have said something to father about sending me away, for his temper has been simply villainous the last week or so, and he and Dick glare at each other like basilisks whenever they meet. They always did hate each other. And last night, just as he was going out, father suddenly took me by the chin and turned my face to the light.

"So you're not happy up here any longer ?" he said.

I quaked in my boots, but I answered defiantly :
"No, father."

"You're safe and healthy, and have enough to eat

and drink," he growled at the back of his throat. "What more do you want?"

"I—I—I want to be a girl," I blurted out, getting red for the second time in my life; "and please let go my chin."

Father glowered at me for a second or two and then laughed silently. "I might have known you'd be your mother's daughter," he said. "I tried to give you a fair chance, to keep you unspotted from the rest of the frail crew, but the taint is in your blood." His voice got fiercer and more excited. "You want the pleasures of the chase, do you? You want to sully yourself in the sordid scramble of lust; to learn to lie, and love, and trick, and ruin a man's faith, do you?—do you, you smooth-faced, innocent little fool? And I tell you again, no daughter of mine—— Oh! my God!" His voice broke suddenly in an awful sort of laugh that was more like a groan.

I stared at him in sheer fright for a minute or two. Father often has black rages, but never anything so horrible to look at as that; his lips were drawn back off his teeth like a snarling dingo, and his eyes were downright red bits of fire. Then he began to laugh in a jeering, staccato way.

"So you're frightened, are you?" he jeered. "Frightened of a man's devil? The day will come when it will no longer alarm you, when you'll play on the beast in him with your dainty fingers just to relieve the ennui of a dull hour, when you'll lash him into madness with your laugh, and break his soul in pieces with the droop of your eyelids between dinner-time and the theatre. Oh! you'll do it fast enough when you're melted in the fire of low passion, you ignorant statue, you fragile, ignoble toy!" He stopped for want of breath, and I gasped with rage myself; I had never been so *furious* in all my life.

"How dare you!" I flamed out at him. "How dare you speak to me like that."

It was almost dark now, for the sun had set, and night

comes down pretty quickly after that. The room seemed full of eerie shadows ; I could only see father indistinctly, and my voice, too, broke in a fair shriek of anger. I expected him to throw me out of the house, but instead of that he only said in a queer amazed and yet pitiful voice, "Trixie!" and made a half-step towards me ; then he seemed to snatch himself back.

"Go and see if Fran has brought the horses in," he said coldly, and I was only too glad to get out.

Really I think father is a little mad sometimes ; but I wonder who Trixie is—I wonder if she is my mother, or some other woman father loved ? It seems too funny for words to think of father ever loving anyone. Perhaps he was horrid to my mother because of Trixie, and that is why she died. Oh dear ! isn't it awkward not knowing anything about oneself or one's parents. I might just as well be a foundling. It's fun in a way, being able to make up stories about them, but it's too bad never knowing whether you're near the right answer or not.

Dick says he *is* going to sell out ! There's really no reason he should stay here now Dad Harcourt's dead ; he doesn't care about station life, what he likes is engineering. He took his course in that in Adelaide, and now he wants to get rid of this place, and after trotting round the Eastern States for a few months' holiday, he's going on one of the mines or to get some billet or other. He says he has rather a good chance of making a good deal at present ; there's some one wanting to buy several miles of land round in this direction, and Dick's place comes in the middle. He says they're going to send up a lawyer or land agent or somebody to arrange the details personally. I suppose he will be a fat middle-aged father of a family and going bald. And Dick is a plain beast to have forgotten my birthday ; it's ten o'clock, so he won't come now. Of course I shan't say anything if he chooses to be nasty ; I shan't show I care, but he might remember I haven't got so many friends that I don't notice the neglect of one.

CHAPTER III

An Evil Aura

THE lawyer-man has come up, and he isn't old or fat. He's the loveliest animal I've ever seen. Di, he's fairly magnificent. He reminds me of the bull Dad Harcourt used to be so proud of ; the great weight of his shoulders is, if he wasn't built in such a lavish cathedral size, almost too much for his hips. I didn't notice his face the first time I saw him riding by ; I couldn't get past those shoulders—I could feel myself being slung across them and carried off to his cave. He looks awfully prehistoric somehow, although he is dressed better than Dick, and his face is smooth like a boy's. I looked at his face the second time I saw him ; I was riding back from East Magnet when I saw him coming, so I pulled off among the trees where I could see him without his seeing me. He looked a bit puzzled when he came up and found I had disappeared, and as he went slowly past I noticed he rested his hand on his revolver. I suppose he thought me a suspicious character: That was when I saw his face properly ; it looked rather nasty, but fascinating. He'd be a brute to cross, worse than father, I should think. I don't think I should like him, but all the same I want to see whether I do or not. He's staying with Dick. He's been there three days now. I asked Dick what he was like, and he said he was decent enough, as if that was an answer.

I got out of Dick later that he has asked him about me, but Dick said he didn't bite. I wonder if I wish he had ?

I'm beastly dull, I wish I had something to do. I've finished the last book Dick lent me ; it's an American novel, such a nice one ; the hero's just like the lawyer-man to look at. It's comic, but you know I'm a bit like the

girl too—her picture's on the front ; she has grey eyes, and a bonnet-hat with big flimsy bows tied under her chin, The hero tells me she has a sweet red splendid kissing mouth ; he stole that from Swinburne, I know, because I've read it. I wonder if I have a kissing mouth ? It curls over at the edges just like hers, but perhaps that's not what makes it kissable. I wonder what kissing's like ?

I asked Dick the other day if he often kissed girls. He said : " Not much ! "

" Why not ? " I queried.

" Mug's game ! " he retorted laconically.

I was sitting on an old case out in their shed, and when he got up to go out and see after some of their stock I still sat there trying to piece it all together. You know the hero in that book said it was the heart-throb of life, and Dick says it's a mug's game. Now, which are you to believe ? I suppose it must all depend on the bent of the people doing it. I read once that the desirability of a woman is not measured by her beauty but by the passion of her lover. I suppose the hero *wanted* to kiss girls, and Dick doesn't.

Oh, dear ! how stupid it is to be only able to quote other people and say what you have read about all the things that matter in life. I do wish I could live instead of looking at everything through a mirror like the Lady of Shalott. I am like her, am I not, Di ? But when she did wake up she got a curse ; I call that jolly unfair. I wonder what really happened to her, why did she have to die ? Tennyson might have explained. Did she fall in love with Sir Lancelot ? I say, Di, the lawyer-man's like Sir Lancelot, isn't he ? Big and handsome like I always fancy him, only he's got yellow hair—it's like the wheat Sir Lancelot rode between—and he's come riding into my life just like he did into hers. What fun ! I wonder will he wake up too ; but I don't suppose he'll ever find out I'm a girl. I almost wish Dick had told him.

I like Swinburne, he seems to like women a lot ; his song about the bad old women makes me want to cry. I think it's only a translation. They are sighing because old age is laying his finger on them, because their cheeks and breasts are withered, lovers no longer delight to play with them ; and when they look at the beautiful girls filling their place, they glance down at their wrinkled hands and say sadly, " And we were once so sweet, even we ! "

It must be terrible to see yourself old and unwanted, to see yourself fading day by day until you sink into nothingness. It hurts me to watch even flowers wilt, I can't bear to pick them. I wonder if I'll die like that, and wither on my maiden thorn in single blessedness, as Shakespeare puts it ? I'm getting sick of Shakespeare. I wonder why Swinburne's bad old women are bad ? All the books you read seem to have some of them in them, but they never quite explain them. I wish I could ask somebody, but there's only Dick, and somehow I feel as if I couldn't talk to him about it. I wonder why. I never thought of anything I couldn't ask Dick about before.

Never mind, Di, perhaps we'll find out everything there is to know some day.

Last night was glorious ; the sky was as clear as a frost could make it. Have you ever tried to count the stars, just for fun ? I often do. I was hanging out of my window doing it, and all of a sudden I got frightened. Have you ever felt evil, Di ? Felt it in the room, creeping closer and closer, and folding round you like a blanket stifling the air in your nostrils ? I'd got to a hundred and forty-four when I felt it first. It must have been there some time, because all of a sudden I felt it near me, and I nearly died with terror ; my heart stopped beating, and then started with such a rush it seemed to choke me, and I could feel the beastly thing at my back. I tried to still go on counting and ignore it, but oh ! Di, I'm not a coward, but I had to face that. I wheeled like a flash, and stood pressing my back against the window. My hand went

up to my throat to steady my breathing ; I tried to pierce through the blackness of my room to see where the Thing was. I never want to feel so utterly helpless and deserted again. It seemed as if there was no one on the earth but me and It, and I didn't know what It was or what It was going to do to me.

"I'm not afraid of you," I tried to say, but nothing came out ; and then I couldn't bear it, Di, and—I suppose it was babyish of me—I jumped through the window, and I almost felt it clutch me as I jumped. For a half-minute I lay where I fell, trembling all over, but even outside the beastly thing wasn't quite gone, and then I was so unnerved I did a thing I'd never done before—I prayed like people do in books. I stretched up my arms to the stars and whispered, "God keep me from evil, God keep me from evil, God keep me from evil ;" and I stood like that until the beastly thing went away. It went away, Di. I wonder if God *did* hear ?

I didn't go back to my room that night, I slept under the trees. It sounds rather mad and fanciful in the broad daylight now, but I don't think it *was* fancy. You know Dad Harcourt used always to say that evil was a real thing, a sort of spiritual aura that enfolded people like a mist. It felt like that too.

There was another queer thing, though ; while I was talking to God I didn't hear hoof-beats coming along the track, but as I stood waiting they came close and a horse-man went past me. It was the lawyer-man. I saw his yellow hair in the moonlight, and when he galloped away the evil went too. Do you suppose it could be anything to do with him ? Oh ! it's absurd, isn't it ? He has too nice a face.

What on earth will I do with myself ? Shall I go over and see Dick ? But then the lawyer-man is with him, so I won't. What an ass I am ! Because I want to see him again awfully ; but that's the very reason.

One man I read about said psychology (whatever that is) proves we always do what we want. I don't think he'd

have said that if he'd been a woman. I think I'll just saddle Nugget and go to the top of Lover's Rise. There's a lovely dippy view there, bending in and out over the russet heads of the gums down to East Magnet and the train that takes you away to Perth and civilisation and life. Ta-ta, Di!

CHAPTER IV

Hercules

EVER peeled spuds, Di ? I think it's a rotten occupation, but I suppose it's got to be done. One must eat, and of course Fran can't do everything. He cooks beautifully, and he has taught me lots too ; he says I am quick at learning, and I really can fry exquisite omelets. Fran says mine are almost better than his—that is a great concession.

But, of course, I can't make all the dishes he can. He used to be a chef once in Paris (he has been almost everything there is in every place), so I mostly have to do the dirty jobs, cutting up beans, stoning fruit—when we can get it—and peeling spuds. To-day I sat outside, with the dish between my knees and my shirt-sleeves rolled up, peeling spuds. I hate the nasty feel they leave on your fingers, but nothing could make me bad-tempered on such a heavenly morning. The sun makes all sorts of vicious jabs at you when you least expect it ; his favourite trick is to leave you in shadow for a while till you think you're safe, then through a crack in the leaves to land you a beauty in the eye.

Fran was inside, making a veal pie. I think anyone would be quite surprised to see our kitchen. It is beautifully clean and neat. Fran looks a dirty old pig, but he is really scrupulously particular. He is so wizened-up and small and dark-skinned, and one eye's gone—you see he can't look very nice, but he never starts to cook without washing his hands ; and we've got all kinds of saucepans and pans and pots, rows of them, and egg-whisks, and all the latest cooking appliances. (That's how they put it in

the catalogues.) He won't often let me use the egg-whisk, though, he says eggs are lighter beaten with a fork.

Fran and I do all the inside work between us. You see, we have no women here. He scarcely does anything about the place; there really doesn't seem anything to do beyond feeding the horses and watering them. They have to be led to the dam morning and evening for a drink, we give it them in a bucket at midday. Father mostly does that; the rest of the time he goes out riding or reads. He doesn't keep any sheep or stock like Dick does. I don't know where he gets his money from; he can't be a remittance man, because he's an Australian—I know that much.

Fran does the housework, and I fill in my time anyhow I like. Father never asks any questions, and the less he sees of me the better pleased he is. I never used to be dull, but somehow the things that used to satisfy me don't any more. Once I thought life held nothing nicer than to go off on Nugget's back, take a gun and some food, and shoot wild turkey or kangaroos; often I would stop out all night; but I haven't done it now for weeks and weeks.

I read most of the time, but I get sick of it; I'm jealous of the girls in books. I hate Alison Lee now—that's the girl with the chiffon bows under her chin who's like me. I pitched her across the room the other day, I was so utterly tired of the way the hero kept adoring her. I want someone to adore me.

Peter, you are an ass!

One bit of excitement happened to-day, Di. I've been keeping it to the last. Hercules came past our place. Hercules, of course, is the lawyer-man. He is beautiful, Di, just like a print I once saw of Hercules—such a glorious muscley look. He is not delicately built enough for Apollo, he is force incarnate; I could just sit and worship him.

I saw him coming ages off down the track, and I felt so excited I kept putting up my hand to my face, which streaked it beautifully with potato water; I must have

looked a nice object by the time he arrived. I pulled my hat down over my eyes so he shouldn't notice me, then I pushed it right on the back of my head so he should. Then I told myself what an all-fired fool I was, as if he'd look at me at all—of course, he'd ride straight past.

He did too, although he slackened his horse to a canter and I felt ridiculously disappointed. Why on earth should a perfect stranger make me feel like that? What is the matter with me? I went on peeling the spuds and calling myself names. Then he turned his horse and came slowly back. He reined up beside me. I went on peeling spuds. "Good morning," he said. I nodded. I was shy, but I suppose he thought I was sulky. He scratched the mare's neck with the whip-handle. "Mr. Piper, isn't it?" I put down the dish and stood up. "He's my father," I said. "My name's Peter. Is there anything you want?" And then I looked at him.

He smiled down, and then I saw his eyes were like two bits of the sky on a sunny day. "I was going to ask," he said, "if you would mind giving my mare a drink; the poor brute's hot, I'm no light weight, you see."

He didn't look it, but he swung himself down from the saddle lithely enough. I looked at the mare, her sides were heaving.

"You've come a good way," I said. "I'll give her a rub down," and I went to the outhouses to get a rag.

When I came back he had planted himself comfortably in the shade. "I say," he remonstrated once, "it's awfully good of you, but I ought to be doing that."

"You're hot yourself," I said curtly. "I'll get you a drink presently," and I went on rubbing.

His gaze wandered to the half-finished dish. "Well, I'll have a go at the potatoes," he said.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I retorted, "we want some for dinner." I was getting over my shyness now, so I didn't make my voice so curt and grumpy, and I was so amused at the idea of him tackling those spuds with his dandy clothes on that I just threw back my head and

laughed. And at that he started in his seat, a look of incredulous surprise came into his eyes for a minute, and he made as if to speak, but I ducked my head and returned vigorously to the rubbing. I wouldn't talk any more.

While I was doubled up underneath the mare's belly I could look at him without him noticing. He was still staring at me, or as much of me as he could see, with that puzzled, almost suspicious look in his eyes; it was as if a grey cloud had drifted across them.

He couldn't for a minute imagine I'm a girl, do you think, Di? How could he? Of course, my laugh—but even then——

When I brought him the drink I still wouldn't look at him. He must have thought I was an uncouth cub. But when he'd had it he didn't show any signs of going, so I picked up my tin of potatoes, settled it between my knees, and started work again. After a while it seemed to occur to him that he was rather cool.

"Do you mind my staying a bit?" he asked with such a lovely smile, the sort that thaws you right out, and makes you feel as if a ray of sunshine had hit your heart. "You see, I've nothing to do this morning, and Dick's out after some of his stock, and I'm tired of riding about by myself—unless you'll come for a ride, too?"

"I've got to finish the spuds," I said, but I did want to, awfully.

"Well, they won't take long."

"Then I've got eggs to beat up." I hadn't, and I don't know why I said it, for I wanted to go.

He stared at me, and slowly the twinkle began to deepen in his eye, and then he laughed—a rich, deep-throated laugh; it gurgled and bubbled and roared with merriment, like the creek coming down at flood time. I would have been angry if he'd laughed any other way, but he checked himself in the middle and got up. "What an uncivil brute you must think me," he said, "but on my honour I wasn't laughing quite at what you

said; it looks rather as if you didn't care for my acquaintance."

"Oh!" I said. "Indeed——"

"Well, will you come riding with me to-morrow morning? It's fearfully dull with no one to talk to but Dick; we always quarrel, you see, always did at college; sometimes I'm driven in desperation to flirt with Emma."

I tried to petrify a smile. The idea of him and old Emma! And then I saw father coming. Somehow I felt scared. "Do go," I said quickly; "here comes father."

I thought it nice of him not to ask a single question. "Right," he said, and held out his hand. "Good-bye," I gave him mine, and as he held it he looked down at me with that calculating sort of flicker in his eyes again; it did look rather small in his.

"To-morrow, then," he asked, "at the Forks; what time—ten?"

"Yes," I said quickly. "Go."

I was peeling spuds when father got round.

CHAPTER V

Lover's Rise

FRAN and I had quite a heated argument this morning. He wanted to have a grand baking day, and of course he needed me to beat his eggs up and keep the fire going, and odd jobs like that ; he nearly fell over when I said I was going out.

"It bake day!" he expostulated.

"You can bake to-morrow just as well," I said.

"You go ride to-morrow just as well," was his retort.

"I'm going to-day," I said.

Then Fran lost his temper. I shrugged my shoulders till he'd spent all his everyday oaths and then I said: "I've fixed the bunks and done the spuds. Good-bye!"

"Obstinate devil," Fran said. "One tink you got lover."

"Mind your own business," I said, and walked off to the stable.

It didn't take me long to saddle Nugget, and he was as pleased as I. He sidled all over the road pretending he was scared to tread on the heavy blue shadows. I felt absurdly happy, I just had to sing. My voice is like an omelet having a dispute with the frying-pan, but I don't mind when there's no one to hear. Nugget is used to it. So I sang at the top of my voice:

"Now this is the lilt of rollicking Kate,
Who rode on a handsome bay:
Lovers may come and lovers may go,
Lovers there be from high and low,
But little she recks of them all, I trow,
The rollicking lass of the Lowries."

It's a great song. Alan McTaggart used to sing it to me ; he was an old rouse-about over to Dad Harcourt's. He's dead now ; he got killed when he was drunk. He was nearly always drunk, but there was one quite surprising thing about Alan ; when he was too far gone to walk he could still run, so when they were kicked out of the pub. the other men used to stand him up against the wall, he'd sight a tree fifty or a hundred yards off and make for it full tilt ; when he reached it he would cling to it till he could make out another object to run at, and if he missed it he would fall down and lie there till he recovered. That's how he would get home. But one night he must have run the wrong way, for they found him three days later at the bottom of a shaft. Anyway, he was a great hand at singing. I wish I could sing.

I hurried Nugget up like anything—not that he minded—I was so afraid of being late, and when I got near the Forks I was afraid of being early and I made him walk. I wished after all I had put on a silk shirt, I had only put on a clean blue one ; I have some silk ones I wear when I want to feel specially clean and on Sundays. Sunday makes no difference at our place, but I always go across to Dick's to dinner, though I didn't go last Sunday because of the lawyer-man. I don't know what Dick thought of my not turning up, because I haven't seen him since ; he is so busy, I suppose, showing Hercules about. I wanted to go, too, but I didn't like to, and though I called myself a blithering ass I knew I couldn't.

And then I turned the corner, and he was there waiting for me. He looked like a bronze statue sitting motionless on the mare, for he had a brown rig-out on and the sun struck red sparks out of the mare.

I half pulled Nugget up, I felt like turning round and bolting for home. I had wondered whether I'd tell him I was a girl, but as soon as I saw him I knew I couldn't. As soon as he saw me he waved.

“Hallo !” he called out gaily ; and I stopped being shy. It didn't matter whether he thought me a boy or

a girl; he was dull and wanted someone fresh to talk to, and so did I. Let's get what fun out of it we could and lump the worry; so I waved back and called out: "Hallo yourself!"

"You're late," he said as he drew alongside. "I was beginning to be afraid you weren't coming. By the way, it only struck me after I left that I never introduced myself. My name's Ware—Rex Ware."

"I know," I said thoughtlessly; "Dick told me." And then I bit my lip and glanced at him, but he took no notice.

"I supposed he had," he said, "but still I should have mentioned it. What's the best direction to ride in?"

I considered a minute. "There are several good rides round this way, but I think the very nicest is to follow this track a couple of miles and then turn off to the left and go to Lover's Rise, and then home round the New Star Mines."

"Lover's Rise!" his eyes looked quizzically down at me. "That's a queer name for such a lonely desert-like place."

"It was named after a man named Lover," I explained. "He died there prospecting. Thirst, you know; and there's a creek within a few hundred yards of it, too, though it may have been dry at the time—I don't know exactly; it was in the early days."

"Poor beggar!" Hercules commented. "The men out back have pluck. I suppose you know every inch of the country round?"

Our horses were cantering along together kicking up the dust, as gay with the freshness of the morning as were we.

"I guess I do," I answered; "I've ridden and shot over it ever since I was born."

"You've always lived here, then? Must be a pretty lonely sort of life. There aren't many fellows of your age, are there?" His eyes narrowed as he looked at me.

"Only Dick," I said frankly; "I don't know anybody else. I've no friends at all."

"Poor kid!" he said, but so nicely that I didn't mind his pity. "I suppose you know Dick pretty well?"

"Rather! You do, too, don't you?"

"The same as one knows heaps of chaps. I went to college with him; we were never pals. I had no idea it was Bully Harcourt I was coming up to, though. He's been very decent to me, I must say. You've never been to college?"

"No, I haven't; but how do you know?"

"Because you've—— You might be offended?" The blue eyes fairly bored holes in me.

"No, I won't. Go on."

"Well, I suppose you won't like it, but—you'd have had a lot more things knocked out of you if you had. In some ways you're almost"—he hesitated a second, and then added—"girlish!"

I tried hard not to, but in spite of myself my mouth stretched in a smile. "Am I?" I said as indifferently as I could; and at that Hercules drew a slow breath that sounded like "A—ah!" as if he were satisfied about something.

"You know," he went on, "I've been rather curious to meet you ever since the first time I saw you."

"When was that?" I asked, turning in my saddle. I didn't know he had seen me.

"One day Dick and I were out, you passed close to us, but you didn't notice us. I only saw your face just over the top of the scrub, and"—again the blue eyes narrowed—"I thought you were a girl."

"Did you?" I kept my eyes down because they were dancing. "But what made you still curious?"

"Well, Dick was so confoundedly mysterious about you; at least, I couldn't drag any information out of him—the more questions I asked the more he shut himself up. Men usually aren't so dashed close about another man." Again the eye battery.

"Look!" I cried quickly, "there's a quandong tree; do let's get down, I love them;" and in half a second

I was off Nugget's back, gathering them. He came too, and for a while we just ate and ate, and he left me and Dick alone. But I wonder why Dick wouldn't tell him anything; perhaps he thought I wouldn't like it.

We chatted about nothings till, moving round the tree, I suddenly stumbled over a root, and should have fallen but for his arm which I grabbed; then, as if acting on a sudden impulse, before I'd time to guess at it, he encircled me with his other arm and for a moment held me, then his eyes widened out to their widest.

"You *are* a girl!" he cried triumphantly.

For the third time in my life my face turned to blazing fire; then with all my might I struck him across the mouth and flung myself into my saddle. I looked over my shoulder and hurled one word at him. "Cad!" I said, and went for home like the wind. How dare he touch me! I'll never forgive him—never! Never! Never!

CHAPTER VI

Hercules Peels Spuds

I WAS sitting outside peeling spuds again when I saw him coming. First I thought I'd clear inside and lock the door; the next I thought I wouldn't let him think I was afraid, so I just went on peeling away and not taking the least notice of anything. Fran was down in the woodshed. I felt him beside me, but I wouldn't look up, not even when his shadow fell across the dish.

"Are you still angry with me, Peter?" he said.

I peeled away industriously.

"I'll go down on my knees if you like!"

Still silence.

"I'll even knock my forehead on the ground, Eastern fashion."

The picture it conjured up was so ludicrous it was hard work to choke down a smile, but I did. Then he was silent for a minute or two, and when he spoke again his voice was different.

"You were right to be annoyed," he said gravely; "my action was most discourteous, but you must remember you stood on the footing of a boy. I may have had my suspicions, but I did not know you were not what you seemed to be, and I acted without thinking. I most sincerely beg your pardon."

This time I looked up; he stood bareheaded and the wind ruffled his yellow hair, and somehow the quiet courtesy of his manner made me feel an awkward, clumsy, ill-behaved fool.

"Please don't say anything more," I said quickly;

"and—and—I'm sorry I hit you—but," I added, "I'd do it again."

The sun came out in his eyes once more. "I'm glad you would," he said, and we shook hands. Then we stood looking stupidly at each other, and neither of us knew what to say next until his glance happened to fall on the dish beside me.

"Do let me help you with the potatoes," he said; "really I can peel them, my sisters used to make me often when I was a kid," and without waiting for me to forbid him he drew an old kerosene case forward and began.

When Fran came back from the wood-shed he nearly had a fit.

"Fran," I said hastily, "this is Mr. Ware; he's staying with Dick; he's a lawyer."

Fran blinked at him like an opossum. I forgot he has a down on lawyers; he says they cheated him out of some money he had left him once. "Lawyer," he said disparagingly, "one big tief."

"Then you should be all the more pleased to meet a comrade," Hercules laughed, "for"—his glance summed him shrewdly up from the dirty old cap on the side of his grey wire hair to his slightly bowed legs—"I should say you'd been a pirate in your time yourself."

Fran was quite won over. "Mebbe," he said oracularly, though his broken old teeth showed in a grin, "mebbe," and he took the wood inside.

"He is very old," I said by way of apology; "it was nice of you not to mind."

"What rot!" he replied; "all business is robbery, more or less organised, if it comes to that. I should say he was a character, myself; I'd like to get him talking."

"That's no hard matter; if you like I'll get him to tell you about Brazil some day; he comes from there, and according to him there's no place like it. His tales beat Sir John Mandeville's; even the Baron Munchausen is nowhere beside him."

He looked at me with a curious expression. "You must have read a good lot."

"I've nothing else to do," I explained. "I often spend whole days in Dick's library. Dad Harcourt had crowds and crowds of books, he was a B.A. or something of Oxford. He was awfully clever, and he used to tell me stories about Greeks, and history and things, when I was quite little, and so made me want to read about them."

He reached for another spud. "Do you go over to Harcourt's much? I've never seen you about."

"Just when I feel inclined," I said. "I haven't been lately because I had brought home all the books I wanted; but I always go to dinner there on Sundays."

"You didn't last Sunday."

"No, you were there."

"Am I such an ogre as all that?" He threw back his head and laughed.

"No," I said, a little embarrassed, "but I didn't know you, and Dick didn't say anything about it, and——"

"I see!" He frowned and made a vicious jab at a piece of peel. "Seems to me our friend Dick has rather an objection to us meeting each other."

"You're imagining things," I said; "why should he?"

"Easy enough to find a reason." His eyes made me uncomfortable, so I peeled vigorously; he did too, and then he said without looking up, "It's cheek of me to ask it, and you needn't answer if you don't want to, but"—he jabbed at the peel again—"are you engaged to Dick?"

"Engaged?" I echoed.

"Yes, are you going to marry him?"

"I know what you mean," I said, "but—but——" and I went off into a peal of laughter. "I'm awfully rude," I added, contritely, "but—oh! Dick and me. How lovely! Can I tell him?"

"As you please, but I don't think he'll like it." He looked up, and the sun came out in his eyes. "So it's a clear field; I had no right to ask you, but I can't see why he's trying to keep me off the grass."

"He isn't," I said. "Dick is just my pal—why, here he is!" It was only too true; he was within a hundred yards of the house. We hadn't heard the hoof-beats on the soft track. I don't know why, but Hercules and I looked at each other in sudden dismay. Of course there was no reason why we shouldn't be there together, only——

Dick sprang down. "Hallo, Peter!" he cried, "thought I'd roll over, you—why——" he stopped for just one fraction of a second, and added a little less cordially, "Hallo, Rex!"

Hercules went on peeling calmly. "Hallo, old chap!" he responded. "You arrive, with your usual shrewdness, at the end of the lesson;" he shook the water from his hands. "Miss Peter is teaching me domestic economy."

Dick smiled, but there was the hint of a frown in his eyes. "You look industrious," he said. I knew he was aching to ask when we met and how, but Dick is a gentleman. "Oh, well," he said, "I just came along to see how you were; you haven't been across lately."

"I find out," said Hercules, "I'm the cause. I'm sorry I scare your visitors off, Dick."

"Oh, rot!" said Dick. "Well, now you know each other," his tongue dwelt ironically on the word, "there is no excuse for you, Peter." He was fairly trapped. "We'll expect you as usual next Sunday."

"Are you going already?" I asked.

"Yes, I didn't mean to stay." He turned to Hercules: "I was wondering if I'd strike you anywhere, I'm going to take you to Ten Mile Creek this afternoon. We must make an early start."

A sort of shadow flitted across the Greek god's face, but he answered pleasantly: "I'd better come with you, then. Good-bye, Miss Peter, and thanks for the lesson." But as Dick turned away he said quickly and in a low voice, "If I can get away any time to-morrow will you come riding?"

I nodded and picked up the dish of water to take it

inside: I watched them from my window till they were out of sight. Hercules looked back twice, but they couldn't see me. I believe he is right—Dick doesn't want him to know me. I wonder why? Well, it's not Dick's affair.

"Peter," Fran said to me that night, "he big fine man; he you lover?"

"Don't be a fool," I said.

He chuckled. "That why for you no stop home bake day, eh, Peter? No such fool as you t'ink."

I don't believe he is;

CHAPTER VII

In the Firelight

I STAYED home to-day as I had promised, but when four o'clock came I began to think he hadn't been able to get away; it commenced to rain, too, a heavy wetting drizzle, so I concluded that finished it. Really I was most ridiculously disappointed, but it is so lovely to have someone new to talk to. Besides, I like looking at beautiful things. Anyway it wasn't any use sitting there with my nose glued to the window, so I went into the kitchen and started to fry some scones for tea. You needn't laugh; the way Fran does them they are nicer than baked ones. I had an apron tied round me and my arms all over flour, when the door flung open and he came in half-drowned.

He stood there, his wet clothes shining like tinsel in the firelight, staring at me with a comical apologetical look. "I came to say," he explained, "I was sorry I couldn't come; and here I am mucking up your kitchen."

"Never mind the kitchen," I said, "sit down and get dry."

"I'm not very wet," he said, squinting at himself critically. "I'll hang my coat on the chair if you don't mind, it hasn't come through to my shirt; and if you lend me an old towel I'll wipe my trousers down—it's a rough tweed, and the water clings to it more than soaks in."

When we got him dry a bit, he explained that Dick had simply taken charge of him all day. "I shouldn't be here now," he said, "only a message came in that some cows or camels or rabbits or something were sick,

so Dick had to go and see about them, and I came over here to explain to you."

"You needn't have bothered," I said. "I'd have understood."

"I wanted to come," he said, and somehow he made me drop my eyes.

"Well," I said, returning to the scones. "Won't—will you stay to tea now you're here? It's too wet to go riding."

"Nothing I should like better," he said promptly, "but——"

"Father's gone to East Magnet," I supplemented; "he won't be back till nine at the earliest, and if he gets drunk, till much later."

He looked at me with such a queer expression. "You poor kid!" he said again; "and are there no women here at all?"

"Only old Emma, and she is so cross I keep out of her way as much as I can."

The blue eyes grew stormy. "It's a shame," he declared; and I looked up and smiled.

"Thank you," I said.

He watched me a while. "What beautiful round arms you have!" he said irrelevantly. "By George! it is a shame; and no friends!"

"Only Dick."

"You're lonelier than I, and I thought I was bad enough. I'm an orphan, and I've only two married sisters, much older than I; they brought me up, but of course they have families of their own now, and since I was big enough to go to college they haven't wasted much affection on me. As a matter of fact they're only step-sisters; my father married again late in life, and my mother died when I was about five years old—I can only just remember her. My father was quite broken up by her death, and he soon went too. I don't think his children ever quite forgave him his second marriage, so naturally they didn't care much about me. I've had a lonely life,

too, you see." He looked at me with a whimsical smile: "Peter, shall we two lonely ones be pals?" He held out his hand, and, forgetting all about the flour, I laid mine in it. He held it and smiled down at me. He's so big, he almost stifles me.

"We're pals then?" he queried.

"Yes," I said.

"Yes"—his eyebrows lifted a little—"what?"

I knew what he meant, but just for mischief I looked him in the face and gravely said: "Yes, thank you."

He burst out laughing, but he wouldn't let go of my hand. "Yes, Rex," he said.

I looked out of the window. "Let go my hand," I said quickly; "here comes Fran."

"Yes, Rex," he insisted.

"Yes, Rex," I snatched it away just as Fran came in, but he saw the flour on Hercules' hand, and his old face wrinkled in a positively wicked grin.

"You are a bully," I said crossly to him as I rinsed out the frying-pan; but I wasn't really cross. We had such fun at tea and after. As it was still too wet to think of going out, we all sat round the fire. We couldn't talk properly with Fran there, so Rex just held my hand. I didn't like it at first, it made me feel as if I had pins and needles, but after a bit I did. I hope Fran didn't see.

Then a brilliant idea struck me. "Fran," I said, "tell us about Brazil. Mr. Ware's never been there—tell him about that stone man."

Fran beamed at us through his spectacles. "You wan' hear?" he demanded of Rex.

"Very much," he replied.

Fran leant forward with pleased importance to start his pipe afresh, and Rex murmured to me, "In the firelight, Peter, your ear looks like a roseleaf blown against your cheek."

I tried to draw my hand away, but he wouldn't let me, and then Fran began. The room was dark and eerie because

there was no light but the fire dancing up the walls, and somehow it suited his tales.

"Dis tale I tell you," he said solemnly, "it true. In Bre-zil was a man what had famille, big famille, and ten nannies. You know what a nanny is? A bill-goat. Yes, and he go out to feed his nannies and he come to little spring. Dat," Fran pokes an unoffending brick with his stick, "de spring. Not far he come on by flat stone here." Fran tapped another brick. "He tell his wife bring his dinn' to de flat stone. De stone here jus' lak dis brick here 'tween you and me. He sit on de stone eat his dinn' an' no can get up. He put up one foot lak dis, try push himself, de foot stick, den he tak' he han's to push. De han's stick. His wife she fright and try to pull him off. No can. She fetch de police, dey no can, de man stick. It true," he said earnestly, "de man die and turn to stone too; he dere still, I haf seen; he sit lak I tell you his foot and hands stick; it near big city in Bre-zil."

"What big city?" I demanded.

"Dey call it San Domingo—you know it?—de cit' San Domingo." He nodded his head soberly. "I have seen."

Rex and I smiled at each other.

"What sort of stone would that be, Fran?" I asked.

"I not know de Engleesh name," Fran replied seriously; "it haf name in Bre-zil. Dey haf noder rock dere; it haf tree corner, you see—one corner, two corner, tree corner—lak my finger, and it go to point top; when you hit wiz your knuck' it ring lak bell. Dey try to dig it out, take it way; dey no can break it—it too hard."

"What a character!" Rex whispered. "I suppose you've a good many strange animals too in Brazil?"

"Oh, lot strange animals in Bre-zil," Fran pursued in bland innocence. "One beast dere, oh! he horrible, he haf twenty eyes."

"A spider," I suggested.

"Oh, no! he big, big as small pig, and when he go to sleep he shut half his eyes and de oder half dey watch.

Yes, and de nex' night dose eye sleep and de oder watch. He draw de sleep eye right back in his head. Dey have noder queer beast lak small pig dat live at bottom of rivers, always under de wat', I haf seen." He wagged his old head complacently.

"Haven't you any mermaids?" I said mischievously.

"Mermaid"—Fran caught me up at once—"dat it; I no remember de English name. I haf seen mermaid. You know de hot spring, a fountain come up boiling, all steam and mud, dat where de mermaid live."

"Phew!" Rex whispered, "cosy winter quarters at any rate. Go on."

"Sometimes," Fran continued, gazing dreamily into the past, "de mermaid come up and sit on de bank, an' you see her. If you see her before she see you it all right; but," he continued impressively, "if she see you before you see her you sick for fourteen days."

"Oh!" I said.

"Yes," Fran repeated, "if she see you first; if you see her first it all right, but if she see you first you sick for fourteen days jus' lak I tell you. You no can keep food on your stomach, it all come up; after fourteen days you get well again."

"Have you ever seen one?" I at length summed up courage to inquire. Fran's statements are so positive that it requires some self-possession to question them.

"I have seen dead one, not live."

"Are they pretty?"

"No," Fran replied, thereby destroying a long cherished illusion, "dey haf coarse hair lak Indians, not prett' lak yours; but dey live in de hot springs, it true. Dere noder strange ting dere," he continued. "I see litt' man, so high two-tree feet; dey live right way in de big fores', and on mount'ns—de sierras dey call 'em; dat where I born, in de Sierra Grande. No one ever see them, dey tin' litt' men and dey haf de foot turn backwards; dis bone," he touched his tibia, "turn backwards. Ver' funn'," he reflected; "an' when dey sleep at night dey

hang themselves on branch of tree. Dey live wid pigs in de fores', de wil' pigs, no one ever see them; but at night on de sierra, when it all still, you can hear dem cry—dey cry, 'Ai! Ai!' all troo de fores'."

He rested his chin on his bent old knees and seemed sunk in the reflections of the past.

Rex and I sat very still, but he kept his eyes on me all the time. He has promised to come riding with me again to-morrow if he can get away from Dick. It was lucky father came home late, because we forgot all about the time; but he was drunk—I thought he would be.

CHAPTER VIII

Fairy Tales

How funny it is to think that a week ago I hadn't even spoken to Rex, and now it seems as we'd known each other all our lives. He is a lovely pal. Of course there's nothing like an old pal; I'm no turncoat, but all the same Dick has never tried to please me as Rex does. He'll do anything at all I like. He even played fairy tales with me to-day; Dick never would.

I didn't like to tell him at first when he asked me how I amused myself, but he sort of wormed it out of me somehow. I suppose it's because he's a lawyer, and it's his business to get people to say things they don't want to.

"Rex," I said, we were sitting in the shade resting half-way after our ride, "Rex, what do lawyers do?"

"People," he answered with a twinkle in his eye, "the same as other business men."

"No, but seriously," I pouted.

"Anything in the legal line that brings in shekels," he replied, "at least, our firm does. If anyone stumbled in here and saw you lying stretched out like that, Peter, they would think they had come upon Artemis."

"Why?" I said.

"I don't know. I think she must have been like you, so boyish and slim, and with such frank grey eyes that know nothing of love."

"How do you know I don't?" I retorted.

"Well, do you? I don't believe you can feel."

I wonder why his eyes make me wriggle.

"What made you want to be a lawyer?" I asked:

Rex followed my lead at once, he is always courteous,

with a ceremonious old-fashioned sort of courtesy that seems so out of place on top of his teasing. He teases awfully, but, as he says, pals ought to be able to say anything to each other.

"My father was one, and his reputation helps me a bit; besides, I'm ambitious." His jaw set in that unpleasant sort of way like when I first saw him from the shelter of the trees. "I want to make money, and I want to make a name for myself." Amusement made his eyes like running water. "My demands are rather modest, don't you think?"

"And how will you do it?" I asked.

"I wish I knew the answer myself," he laughed. "Work, I suppose, and perhaps marry a girl with money or influence like the famous barrister in *Pinafore*."

"I don't know him," I said disparagingly; "but would you marry a girl for her money?"

"Why not?" he shrugged his shoulders. "You've been brought up on novels I see; marriage is a business proposition."

"But—but—" I said, "won't you—wouldn't you like to love a woman?"

He seemed just tickled to death.

"I would," he agreed. "But that doesn't say I'd marry her. Some say marriage and love aren't compatible."

"Oh!" I said; then the laughter in his face reassured me. "You're just teasing me," I said.

"Perhaps I am," he agreed. "You see, I never met a girl with a perfect mouth before, and I'm sure that's the only sort of girl I could love."

"You do talk rubbish," I said, crushing the dead gum leaves in my palms. "I believe fairy tales would be more sensible than you."

And that's how it all came out. It was mainly because I had always been so lonely and I've had to play games by myself, so I used to act fairy tales. I've got a lovely collection of them called the "Blue Fairy Tale Book" Dad Harcourt gave me when I was little. The book is

blue, all covered with gold stars, and it has an old witch riding on a broomstick on the cover. I take it with me nearly everywhere I go, I love them so. I suppose I'm really too big to play games, but there's nothing else to fill in the time with ; besides, I invent all new conversations not in the book, I make the loveliest sort of dialogues between the prince and the princesses. Of course I have to be all the characters myself, and it was so lovely to have Rex to help me.

I didn't like to let him in at first ; I thought he'd laugh, but he didn't. He said he adored make-believe, he'd never properly grown up himself. He said there were hundreds of people like us, but the way they satisfied their longing to pretend to be something else to what they were was by going in for amateur theatricals. "It's only a grown-up way of carrying on 'make-believe,'" he said, "and not nearly as clever as the children's, because they only say words set down for them by someone else. Now, I rather pride myself on my improvising. You give me a trial, Peter ; I'll make a splendid prince."

So finally I did, and oh, it was forty times as nice as playing it by myself. First we played *Cinderella*, and when it came to the ball he took my hand and we zigzagged up and down in a sort of dance like they have in the picture, and he said things about my little glass slippers I'd never have thought of myself. Then we played the *Sleeping Beauty*, and he had to wake me with a kiss. I forgot that when we began to play, but it was only my forehead, and as it was all pretence it didn't matter, Di, do you think ? He was right though, he can invent beautifully. When he stood looking at me while I lay asleep, he said the loveliest things I'd ever heard ; and his voice is so rich, too, it made them sound lovelier than they do just telling you. He said my hair was like a thousand secrets of love curled jealously close to my head, my eyelids were the veil of Isis covering beauty too radiant for human eyes to bear, that my neck was a satin cushion crying out for a lover's head to rest upon it, and my chin the epitome

of a caress. I forget what else, but I never knew people could think of all the things he did.

Oh, Di, I shall miss him when he goes away. He ought to have gone before, he says, for his business is practically concluded, but Dick has told him to stay as long as he likes.

I asked him whatever was he staying for in such a dull place, but he only laughed and wouldn't tell me. He said a few days' holiday wouldn't hurt him or his firm either. His partners could look after affairs quite well. "We're not that rushed with business yet, you know," he said, "worse luck!"

To-morrow I go to dinner at Dick's:

CHAPTER IX

What They Mean by Love

I FELT quite excited on Sunday morning ; I suppose it was partly because I hadn't been to Dick's for such a long while, and partly because Rex was going to be there, too, and somehow I felt Dick didn't like me being with him—I can't imagine why. Surely if he's good enough to be Dick's friend he's good enough for me ? It isn't even as if Dick and I were more than pals, and he could be jealous like men in books, but all the same I feel he's trying to keep Rex and me apart.

I've half a mind to tell him to mind his own business. I put on one of my white silk shirts and a wide blue tie—I do love the feel of silk against my skin—and my best suit, which is grey, with long-cloth leggings instead of my everyday leather ones. I wetted my head and tried to brush some of that beastly niggery curl out of it, but it was no go.

Fran had saddled Nugget, and was holding him for me when I came out. The villain was prancing and fretting, and if Fran took his attention off him for a second he'd give him a sudden jab with his nose trying to push him over. Fran hates Nugget ; he says he's a vicious devil and will break my neck for me one day. But he is quiet enough with me. I think he knows Fran is afraid of him.

I got up and sat still for a minute. I suddenly remembered I'd forgotten to water my Kennedya, and I wanted to tell Fran to do it ; but Nugget was impatient and fidged away, and the saddle didn't feel safe.

“Quiet, Nugget !” I ordered sharply. “Fran, the

saddle's too loose, haul the girth a hole tighter." He attempted to, but the brute side-stepped and danced and finally, when Fran laid a hand on him, kicked. That was quite enough; I will have animals obey; he must be taught a lesson.

"Quiet!" I ordered again, and laid my hand on his neck. Fran approached gingerly, and Nugget kicked again. I lashed him sharply. He bucked. Then I got mad. "Would *you*?" I said, and gave him two or three smart cuts.

This was all my lord needed; in two seconds he was doing fancy curves with his heels somewhere over the front of his ears. Nugget was a fine buckjumper when he was first broken in, but it's not for nothing I've ridden since a kid, half-broken colts too, though they never would actually let me break them in.

For a few minutes it took all my time to stick on; once I thought he had unseated me; but after that I gave him the hammering of his life, and when I drew him up again exactly in the spot we started from, there wasn't a more disgusted, quieter animal in W.A.

"You try any of your fancy tricks again," I said savagely, for it annoyed me to have him play up like that in front of Fran; I always say he is easy to manage, and Fran must have seen the time I all but went off. Nugget didn't show any more desire to, he just stood there trembling and sweating from his efforts. I ran my fingers over his shoulder and held up the beads of sweat.

"Look at that," I said disgustedly. "Here I wanted to start out looking decent, and you'd think he'd done twenty miles. What do you mean by it, you—you stupid cow, you?" A little shudder ran all over Nugget, for he hates me to scold him, but Fran interposed:

"I wipe him down again, Peter."

Nugget let him peacefully enough this time: Several times while he was rubbing Fran looked at me:

"I no like to be your enemy, Peter."

"Why, Fran?"

"You be very—how they say?—savage; you never forgive."

"I suppose you mean vindictive," I said.

"Oh, I dunno! I no like to see you face that way." He rubbed on vigorously. "You smile—you face meant for smiles, Peter," the sly old rascal wheedled. "I think you handsomest girl I ever see in my life."

"Rats!" I said, but I had to laugh.

He smiled, too, at the success of his ruse. "That why I no like you ride this old devil. Some day he kill you, and you too handsome to have harm happen, Peter. I old man, and I smell harm. Take care."

But I only laughed. "Don't be an old croaker," I said. "What harm could come to me up here, such a glorious morning, too? So-long; don't forget the Kennedy. Come on, Nugget, shake it up!"

And he did. We had a gorgeous gallop; we raced our shadows all the way, and he snorted with joy, and I laughed when the goannas fled out of our path up the blue-streaked gums, and the little lizards scuttled away under the dry leaves like the wind blowing on them. He behaved very nicely; only once he shied and swerved when a bob-tailed lizard lying like a piece of bark in the middle of the road opened its blue-and-yellow mouth and spat at him. It even startled me. I suppose if I were an old Greek I'd have called it an omen.

There's nothing like a gallop in the morning, everything smells so clean, and the sky was that drowsy blue that makes small white clouds fall asleep in it.

Rex wanted to ride over and meet me but I wouldn't let him; I didn't think Dick would like it.

I wonder if I really am as beautiful as Fran thinks, but then he's only got one eye and it's half blind.

Dinner was rather awkward; it was all Dick's fault too, but gradually he thawed, and he and Rex swapped yarns of their college days, never taking the least bit of notice of me. The minute Rex spoke to me, Dick would get disapproving again. He simply wouldn't leave us

alone for a minute. I don't know why he acts like an old dog in the manger, for he doesn't want to talk to me himself—he's had years to do it in—but he won't let Rex.

But after tea it was beautiful. We had tea fairly early, and Emma had made some awfully nice cakes. She glared at me nearly all the time. She doesn't like me; she thinks it awful a girl of my age trolloping round in men's clothes, she said so one day, and other things that I didn't understand. As if it was my fault—it's father's. I wouldn't know how to put on girls' things, anyway.

But I wonder if Rex thinks it's not nice of me? He said he didn't when I asked him. He said he'd seen the prettiest girls in Adelaide in their silk and chiffon ball-dresses, and they were not half as lovely as I in my old blue shirt.

But, of course, he only said that because we are pals. I wish I could dress beautifully like a girl, he might think me nicer then, but he says he couldn't. But how can he care for me after all the lovely girls he must have known over there? He can't; he only thinks he does, but he says I'm wrong, and I can't help hoping I am.

When we went into the library it was just the beginning of evening. You know that soft, still time when it is yet light, but all the witchery of evening is beginning to float like a grey film into the air. Rex said as I sat down in one corner and Dick in another: "Shall I sing to you?"

"Do, old chap," Dick said, thawing at once. Dick adores music; besides, while he was singing he couldn't talk to me. But he still waited for me to speak. "Please do," I said stiffly; "we should all be very pleased."

He opened the piano then. Dad Harcourt used to play; he tried to teach me awhile, but as I could never conquer scales he had to give it up. He said he supposed beauty was a talent in itself, and he couldn't expect much else from me. Dick told me Rex had tuned the piano since

he came up, and that he could sing a bit, but oh ! I never knew what singing meant before. I've never heard anyone but Dad Harcourt and Alan McTaggart, and sometimes at East Magnet as I went past the inn. I've heard a girl screeching inside.

But Rex's singing !

It was like thunder, and moonlight, and dreams come true. It was birds in the early morning and the Kennedya at my window drinking in great gulps of the sun—my heart seemed to get too big for my ribs and I wanted to fling myself face down on the carpet before him. Now I know why Fran says they sing all the time in heaven.

He sang for a long time, one thing after another, and in between he played dreamy weird little bits of music that made you feel as if the rain had got down your collar. Once he turned round and said : " Am I boring you ? "

I couldn't say a word, but Dick said, " My dear chap ! Go on till you're tired, we never will be. Why ever didn't you take up singing as a profession ? "

Rex didn't take any notice ; he began another soft little humming on the keys like a bee, and said : " This is a gipsy song." These are the words. You could hear every syllable distinctly, they seemed to drop off his lips like honey :

" You are my darling,
You are my soul,
Light of my life, my sun, my goal.
You are my being,
My delight,
Star of my darkest night."

Then the music changed to silver trumpets.

" Sun of my soul,
Sweetheart of my heart,
Hark how the birds
Sing in your praise !
Hark how the breezes
Wandering by
Whisper, I love you always ! "

Here Emma called Dick out of the room for something. It had grown dark now ; I could hardly see Rex, he was just a big blur against the piano, and his face when he turned it to me a pale glimmer. Then he began again very softly, as if he were whispering in my ear, the first verse :

“ You are my darling,
You are my soul, ——”

He seemed as if he were drawing my soul out of me. Everything hushed suddenly to listen. I believe sometimes the earth is really curious.

“ —— my delight,
Star of my darkest night.”

Even the whisper had died, and we just sat and looked at each other. We couldn't see, and he never moved off the stool, but I felt him so close to me that I was stifled, and I put up my hand as if to push him away.

And then Dick came in with a blaze of light. “ That fool McAndrews,” he said savagely ; “ I've got to go again. I'd discharge the idiot if it wasn't that I'll be out of the place in a few weeks' time ; it's hardly worth bothering with a new one. I'm sorry, Peter, I won't be able to ride home with you. Do you mind going alone—or,” he put as much cordiality into his voice as he could, “ perhaps Rex will go with you.”

He saw us off, and that is how Rex and I came to be going home alone together in the dark. There was no moon, and the stars even seemed to have a pressing engagement elsewhere. Our horses slowed down to a walk, and he took my hand like he did by the fire. But this was different. I didn't say anything because I couldn't.

Then he shifted my hand to his left and put his arm round my shoulders. The bridles were hanging loose on the horses' necks but they paced along as if they knew they mustn't interfere. I couldn't look at him, and I couldn't move—truly, Di!—if he had been going to kill

me. I felt like cold lead, and yet I burnt. Then with his hand he slowly turned my chin round towards him, and pressed his lips full on mine.

He kept them there until I couldn't bear it, it hurt so ; and yet—and yet—I loved it.

Oh, Di ! he has taken my soul. What I told you in jest has come true. My Lancelot has come and I am awake. I know now why I was born. It was just to love him and to love him.

Di, I can't wait till to-morrow to see him again. It is not me who sits here writing, Di, it's not Peter Piper, it's only an empty casket of flesh, my soul is with him in the hollow of his hand, his to make or mar. I don't care so long as it pleases him, for he has given it to me.

Now I know what they mean by love.

Oh, Di ! If he had never come !

CHAPTER X

Too Happy to Live

DI, I'm too happy to live. Rex came over yesterday and to-day—but I can't explain it to you, it's no use trying. You must just believe there's nothing like it in the world. I only live when he is here, the rest of the time I go about in a dream—waiting. How can he love me? I can't believe it yet, it's too incredible after all the girls he must have known—real proper girls—to give his heart to me.

I can't write, Di; I'm living now, and I've only time for that. I wonder what Dick will say when he knows. He is still so queer about Rex and me, it makes it very hard for us to meet. Once he said to me rather awkwardly:

"Look here, Peter. I know you think I'm butting in where it's none of my business, but you've got no one to look after you, and—and——" he got red and fidgeted. "Look here, Peter, Rex is—well, women don't count much to him."

I just blazed at Dick. "And that's how you speak of your guests behind their backs!" I said cuttingly.

Dick flushed again. "Hang it all, Peter," he said, "that's not fair. You don't know anything about life. I like Rex, he's all right with men, but you're a woman."

And at that a little bubble of joy welled up in my heart, and I forgot all about Dick. "Thank God I am," I murmured under my breath. Dick stared at me, and then frowned and walked away, but he tries to keep us apart more than ever. But, of course, he doesn't know Rex loves me. How surprised he will be. He has got to go to Perth to-morrow on business; he got a telegram to-day, and will be away a whole week. Rex and I are just living on the thought of it. We are going to ride in with him to East Magnet to-morrow to see him off by the train. Di, life is glorious!

CHAPTER XI

Off the Chain

WHEN the train puffed away carrying Dick inside, Rex and I turned and grinned at each other. We felt as if we'd been given a holiday, that's what Rex said. "Whoop! there goes Papa Bulldog; and now we've got a whole week off the chain, what will we do with it?"

"Be mad," I said, "quite, quite mad. What shall we do first?"

"Come and buy chocolates. I suppose you can get them at the store?"

"Yes, let's. How Mason's girl will stare at you! But do let us go home soon, people are looking at us so hard."

"That's at Piper's pretty boy," he teased.

"Not they, it's at you."

"The most adorable thing about you, Peter," he said, "is that you don't know how adorable you are."

"Don't make fun of me," I said pettishly.

"You exquisite baby," he laughed.

"Stop," I said, with my cheeks on fire, "if you look at me like that in the township streets people will think you're mad."

"I am when I'm with you," he retorted.

We were sparring so hard we forgot all about the chocolates. We thought of it half-way home.

"I'll get up early to-morrow morning and go in and get them for you," he promised, "before I meet you."

"Oh, but," I objected, "it's such a long ride, and they're not that important."

"Anything you want is important, so I shall go."

I never had people want to do things for me before.

"But we must do something special with our week," I said. "What shall we play at?"

We weighed the question seriously, that is the loveliest thing about Rex, he can make believe so beautifully. Now, Dick can't a bit; I think he would even play with dolls if I asked him, but, of course, I haven't any, and fairy tales and adventures are more fun. "Shall we play *Cinderella* again?" I said doubtfully, "or——"

"I have it!" he cried, "the very thing. We're out in the bush all day; it shall be the *Forest of Arden*. I shall be Orlando, and you my Rosalind. Rosalind was dressed as a boy, you know—why, it's perfect!"

"But we haven't got a Celia," I objected.

"Never mind, she's gone down in the train with Oliver—that's Dick."

"And we simply must have Touchstone; who's going to be Touchstone? It couldn't be Arden without him, Rex!"

"That is a difficulty. I can't be him, too, can I? Got it again! What wouldn't you give for brains like mine, Peter? Fran is Touchstone, he's got quite enough wit."

"Lovely!" I screamed, getting excited; "but, oh! Rex, what shall we do with father?"

The actor-manager considered the question deeply. "He can be the Duke because he appears so little," he decided; "or how about the melancholy Jaques? Can't you just fancy him declaiming 'All the world's a stage'?"

"Or coming in to me, after telling Fran to unsaddle his horse, and saying, 'A fool, a fool! I met a fool in the forest. Motley's the only wear,'" I suggested, "though he always calls Fran a fool."

We giggled so inately the horses caught the mad spirit of the hour and bolted off with us. Our giggles grew to uproarious laughter as we thought of the morrow. "On the whole," I said, as I wiped my eyes with my shirt-sleeve, "I think father had better be the Duke."

"I don't believe he's got enough humour for Jaques," the actor-manager agreed. "Where shall we begin?"

"In the middle, of course; everything in the world begins in the middle, then you start hunting for the cause of it and guess at the finish. That's excitement."

He smiled down at me. "Sometimes you really are a woman," he said.

I tossed my head. "'Dost thou think because I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?'"

"I bar that," Rex declared with emphasis. "It will be strictly against the rules of the game to fire cold slabs of Shakespeare at each other. This is to be a new Arden, our very own, and we've got to invent all our own dialogue. Don't you think we can find enough to say to each other without borrowing other people's words?"

"Very well, then," I threatened, "you must make up some new poetry for Rosalind."

"I will, only my Rosalind is called Peter. Why, it's easy—

'Have you seen my darling Peter?
Than her there is no one sweeter,
Fairer, daintier, or neater,
In the kitchen you can't beat her;
Faith, my lips just ache to greet her,
I can't wait till next I meet her;
If by chance you ——'"

"Stop, stop!" I cried. "'This is the very false gallop of verses.'"

"There you go again!" he said, aggrieved. "And anyway you've no business to talk Touchstone's lines. Tell you what, the penalty for quoting is a kiss."

"Is it?" I retorted.

"Yes, it is, and you owe me two already. I'm going to have them."

"Are you?" I said again, and I dug my heels into Nugget.

"You do ask pointless questions," he laughed as he drew abreast of me. "I said I was."

He did too.

Oh, Di! I wish you could see him, he is like a god. I wish I were a diamond so that he would carry me on his breast, or a gold band that I might bind myself about his finger. If I could be the bread he eats, the water he drinks, so that I were his, his for ever! That—that sounds unmaidenly almost, but there's no one but the stars and you.

And Arden starts to-morrow!

Do you think us a couple of babies, Di? But oh! I never knew one could be so happy.

CHAPTER XII

The Forest of Arden

OH, Di, it was a lark to-day—the first morning in Arden, you know. I didn't tell you where it was, did I? It's just behind Lover's Rise. There's a big dippy hollow on the left that's somewhat cleared, and the grass grows thickly there; just now it was green as green, and lots of flowers poked out silky faces as if they were saying: "Well, here we are, blast it, and we might just as well make the best of it." Oh, I forgot, I mustn't say, "blast it" any more; Rex doesn't like it when I swear. At least, I don't call that swearing, but he does; but he should just hear father.

A creek runs through it too, and it wasn't dry yet, so it was all as fresh and Ardenish as could be. The sun had turned on full pressure, and the birds were twittering in the gums; it is mating-time, and it was too early to have to bother about snakes. Rex had printed a huge card—

YE FOREST OF ARDEN

and he insisted on tying it to one of the gums at the entrance to the hollow. And we kept laughing just at nothing at all—the most idiotic remarks, Di, they seem hardly worth repeating, and yet they were perfect at the time. But when two people feel with each other it does not matter what their lips say, it is each other's hearts they hear beneath the words.

The purple *Kennedya* fairly rioted there. I made a garland of it and hung it round his neck; and then we

found a big patch studded with dandelions, it looked as if there had been a shower of stars.

"My throne," Rex said promptly, "purple and gold, the royal colours. Peter, I shan't be Orlando now, I shall be a king. You shall have a royal lover."

"I shan't," I declared. "I'm Rosalind, and I won't have any lover but Orlando, and if he isn't here 'I'll go sigh till he come.'"

"Every quote a kiss, remember!" Rex said oracularly.

He had to chase me for nearly five minutes round the trees to get it though.

"I believe you quote on purpose," he said mischievously, as we sat trying to get our breath back. It took us another five minutes to make that up.

"All right, Peter—Rosalind," he said, "see if I don't pay you out, not letting your lover be a king."

I stared hard at my boots for a minute, and then I looked at him. "My lover is a king," I said softly, and then I looked at my boots again.

"Peter, don't say things like that," Rex begged in a low voice; "you shame me." And in a queer, passionately respectful sort of way he lifted my hand and kissed my wrist.

Then with one of his sudden changes of mood he laughed merrily. "We mustn't get too serious in Arden, must we? It's all make-believe."

"Everything?" I said.

"Everything," he repeated firmly; and then the gurgle crept into his voice again: "Isn't it hard to make-believe we care, Peter?"

"I believe it is only make-believe with you," I said to tease him.

But to my surprise the sky of his eyes clouded over, and he said sombrely: "I wish to God it were;" then he laughed again, and the cloud vanished as quickly as it had come. "But you are going to cure me. Come, make a start, Peter-Rosalind-Ganymede, 'laugh like a hyæna for I am disposed to be sad.'"

"Who's quoting now?" I reminded him.

"So I was; never mind, I'll pay the penalty."

"No you won't," I protested, "it's not fair."

"Why not? That's what we arranged."

"Not me, it was only you, and——" Rex's face came closer, "besides, Orlando never kissed Ganymede."

"More fool he," said Rex.

"But," I said, when I had succeeded in pushing him away and sitting up straight, "what shall we do now? Shall we go shoot—, hunting?" I corrected.

"Certainly not; one never does anything but make love in the forest of Arden."

"Yes they do; Orlando killed a lioness and a snake."

"And so will I, if they turn up. Well, suppose I sing to you?"

"Yes, do; sing 'Blow, blow, thou——' No, that's too noisy; sing 'It was a lover.'"

He lay flat on his back with his knees drawn up and his hands clasped behind his head, and the liquid notes poured out; the birds seemed to hush their squabbles to listen. I leant up against a tree trunk and gazed down at him; it seemed like heaven to be alone there by our two selves.

"It was a lover and his lass,

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
That o'er the green corn-field did pass,

In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring."

Every note came like melted moonlight.

"Between the acres of the rye,

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino."

He broke off abruptly. "I've got a glorious idea. Let's go paddling in the creek. We'll be Paul and Virginia now."

"What fun!" I said; so we took off our boots and rolled our trousers up to our knees and waded in. It was

glorious ; the water was clear as clear, and in places it simply rushed along, we could hardly keep our balance on the slippery stones, and some of them were so sharp. And every now and then through the foliage the sun seemed to drop sovereigns in the water.

"Rex," I said in one place where the cold current swirled round my ankles, "it's trying to cut my feet off." Then we came to a long shallow where the water slipped over a tray of gravel and quartz ; little green and red and grey-blue bits of stone glistened among the brown gravel, the quartz looked pure as marble, some of it rosy at the edges, some of it streaked with lines of gold. Rex stooped and picked up one piece ; it dripped diamonds on the surface of the water that widened out into winking ripples.

"This looks like paying stuff," he said, squinting at it.

"It's good stone," I agreed, "but costs too much to crush. It comes from a shaft round the bend they opened last year, but they gave it up. Rex, do look at the sunshine on the water, it is making rings on the creek bed and trying to slip them on to my toes. I shall be like the Lady of Banbury Cross soon—oh ! there's one on my big toe now ; do look !"

I laughed with the joy of it, and Rex watched me with his face growing soft.

"You adorable baby," he said at last, with something between a laugh and a sigh ; and—it sounds silly to tell you, Di—but he picked me up and kissed my wet feet.

He is so gloriously strong.

CHAPTER XIII

From Jest to Earnest

ARDEN gets lovelier and lovelier. But perhaps it's because we've got the springtime in our hearts. Is there anything more beautiful than to be young and in love? How stupid and tame books sound after the real thing. I wondered what this love was they talked about, but I guess it isn't because the writers don't know, but because there are no words to tell it with. It is a burning flame in your breast, and flowers opening out in the sunshine, and the hard cold earth of your everyday self bursting away as when the mushrooms push their heads up; it is sweetness so sweet it is almost bitter; it is a hothouse where all the finest possibilities in you expand—it is—oh, Di, I can't explain any more than the books can. You've got to feel it to understand. I love him! I love him! Why can't I tell you what those words mean?

Even heaven must be an anti-climax after this.

What do you think we did to-day, Di? We fished: we sat patiently holding our rods in the creek bed till I nearly went to sleep. Rex yawned awfully, too, but I made him sit quite a foot away from me. I said we would be real proper fishermen; of course we caught no fish—there are none in the creek to catch—but that only made us the more real.

You see we take it in turns to choose the games, and as Rex always plumps for playing lovers I just have to choose something sensible. But his turn came again before sunset, and we sat hand in hand—isn't it queer what a lot it is even to feel another person's fingers across your own?—and we watched the sun sliding down the sky like

a Chinese lantern on a string, casting pink and yellow lights. Half the time we don't want to talk, it's just enough to be with each other. I couldn't have understood that once. Then I broke the silence.

"You know, Rex," I said, "you've never told me yet why you love me."

"But there aren't any whys in love," he said. "You are you and I am I, and that's all there is to it. One can't reason or fight against a thing like this." His eyes took on that inside look again as if he were turning them back on his own soul. "Don't I know it!"

"Well, anyway," I coaxed, leaning back on his shoulder and running lazy fingers through his hair, "tell me how nice I am."

"I'm telling you that all the day long with every glance."

"Yes, but not with your lips. Do, just for once. Pretend I'm Jaques—Orlando tells him about his sweetheart; and then you shall be Celia, and I'll tell you what I think of mine."

"What a woman you are!" he mused.

"And yet you always call me a baby."

"That's the eternal puzzlement of you. I never know which I'm talking to. Sometimes I make up my mind to say things to the woman, and then they stop on the tip of my tongue, for you look up with those grey eyes of yours, and——" he paused.

"And——?" I insisted.

His gaze was fixed stubbornly on the fading lantern, and for a moment he did not answer, then he said in a low tone, "They are not fit for the baby to hear."

At minutes I feel there's a cloud between me and Rex, but I cannot understand what it is. Sometimes when we are happiest he will get up abruptly and suggest doing something else, and lots of funny things like that, but when I ask him what is the matter he just says nothing. And one day when we were lying in the grass after lunch I got so drowsy, and all of a sudden I felt his arm tremble

under my head, and he said in a sharp sort of voice : " Don't go to sleep, my arm aches ; let's fish."

But his arm never aches. Had I done anything wrong, or what ailed him ? Of course he is always Rex, and it sounds disloyal to say it, but sometimes he is a nicer Rex than others. Sometimes I don't like the way he looks at me. But I shouldn't say things like that, Di ; it's my fault, of course ; I'm not used to men.

And then he turned to me with that rare smile of his, " And so, good Monsieur Jaques, you want to know what she is like, this lady of mine ? "

" Nay, then," I pouted, " an't please you to speak of her, speak on ; an't please you not, do the other thing."

" First, then, good Monsieur Jaques, you shall have an inventory of her personal appearance."

" Ripping ! " I said, hugging my knees up and resting my chin on them, my pet position. " Go on."

" She is just tall enough to lean comfortably in the hollow of my arm ; she is slim and graceful as a young sapling, and as strong and clean ; her cheeks are like running blood veiled in crystal and other women's hands are less fair than her naked feet ; her eyes are like the dawn wind over still lakes ; her mouth is the gate of heaven ; and every limb and curve of her cries out for love and rapture, and passion," his voice grew tense ; " and her clean white soul is a veil across her beauty and a sword and shield between desire and her."

" Not to the man I love," I cried quickly, " there is no veil for him, he is my god, my hero, his voice is the noise of rivers joining the ocean and cataracts leaping over the crags and the song of the world in one, he is as beautiful as morning, or Seigfried when he rode the flame, he is Baldyr the Beautiful, my Viking, my sea-robber."

" Don't, Peter, don't ! " he said, and covered his face with his arms as if he were warding off something. Our play seemed turning to earnest.

The sun had set now, and the light was going grey, it was very still ; now and again a little petulant chatter

came from the branches, and once a great flock of cockatoos swept like a floating scarf over the tree-tops—their screams came to us faintly.

"And I," I went on, softer still, for the hour was casting its spell over us both—"if I am beautiful in his eyes, I would all my fairness were a cup of water, that he might drink it down; I would I were a flower on the ground, that he might crush me out of life with his foot. Eyes, cheeks, lips," I cried—and I was startled at myself, but something inside me seemed to be talking—"everything is his. My lord," and then a queer old phrase I had read once in Dad Harcourt's Bible surged up to my lips, and I said with a little bubble of happy laughter, "behold his handmaiden!"

Rex's face in the half-light took on an expression I'd never seen before, it fascinated and frightened me, too, and for a minute I thought he was going to crush me to death in his arms, and I wanted him to. And instead he laughed a harsh, short laugh that wasn't a bit like him, and cried: "Excellent, well acted, i' faith, Rosalind!"

I had never been so hurt before. Does he think I could act a thing like *that*!

And yet when he said good-bye at the slip-rails he said with sudden tenderness, "Peter, girl, I'm fighting a battle, you can't understand, and that's why you make it harder for me. I've never denied myself anything before; some day you'll see that—when I'm roughest and coldest to you, blood of my heart, that's when I love you best." And he rode away quickly.

No, he is right, I do *not* understand. But why was I frightened of him that minute? Father always scares me in his rages; but I love Rex. I suppose it's because I don't know men.

CHAPTER XIV

His Career

It's such a nuisance, but Fran guesses about Rex. I know he won't tell father, but still I wish he didn't know. He is so pleased about it he quite annoys me, and then he says things I don't like at all. He was greasing some bridles when I came out ready to start this morning, and he looked me up and down with a critical sort of glance; his one eye which is half-shut blinked at me through his heavy specs, and his wizened brown old face wrinkled up like a monkey's in a smile of comprehension.

"Eh, Peter!" he said. "You beautiful; you go meet the lawyer-man?"

I nodded curtly, and began to saddle Nugget.

"You lak sun on de flowers, Peter. Eh, but you beauty woman now, you make lover happy. Birds sing in you eyes, Peter. He gran' lover too, big, fine, blood run hot in heem. He lof you mad, Peter; girls lak you make young man mad——"

"Hold your tongue!" I snapped, going scarlet; but Fran let the bridle slip out of his hands and pursued dreamily: "Eh, but I was fine man too, not big, but strong, ver' strong, Peter, eh; and women, they lof me too—I am so old, I forget. There one in Valparaiso, an' Lola over to Bre-zil, her husban' he fierce man but fool, he mak' trouble, he try tak' her away."

"And what did you do?" I was tightening the girth. Fran tells such queer yarns at times, I often wonder if they're true.

"I kill him," Fran answered placidly. "He bleed, ah! lak one pig. Lola she have lips so red as his blood."

"Ugh!" I shivered, "and what became of her?"

"I know not'in'."

"You don't mean to say you went away and left her after killing her husband?" I demanded.

"Ah, bah!" Fran spat disgustedly, "my boat sail nex' week—man must live his life—women for pleasure, not to hinder."

"You callous beast," I said with conviction; but Fran took it as a compliment and tried to straighten his bent old shoulders. It was so pitiful to see a flash of devilry come into his one half-closed eye.

"Gran' young man once, Peter," he sighed, "but old now, and the women all old, too. Old and withere'; they come back no more, the young days, but"—and his voice grew sharper—"I no sorry. The priest he say 'Repent'; I say bah! I do it again, regret not'in'. You be happy while you young. Eh, Peter, but I old man now."

His head sank on his hands. Nugget and I crept out as quietly as we could. For a long while the shadow of Fran's grief for his young days seemed to hang over me till I remembered that I was still living in mine and the joy of life was dancing like wine through my veins, that the sun was flinging nooses of light round my shoulders through the swaying tree-tops, and pricking Nugget on with golden whip lashes; and at the end of my journey would be my lover, my gran' fine lover, to swing me out of my saddle like a featherweight and hold me hostage for a good-morning kiss.

Eh, but Fran was right, it's good to be alive and young. It is near the finish of the Forest of Arden, for Dick comes back some time to-morrow, and so every moment is more precious, but we've promised not to talk about it. I think in a way this afternoon was lovelier than any yet. We had a long serious talk—we are so seldom serious. But in the morning we had been sillier than ever, perhaps it was the reaction. We played fairy tales again. There's one pet one of mine about three princesses, who were kept spinning gold by a wicked witch until, one day, the prince

comes (Rex, of course), and one of them runs away with him (that's me). We have a lovely time in the forest for a while until the old witch finds us out, and then she sends a fireball after us made of seven different kinds of enchanter's nightshade, and a pinch of salt, saying :

“ Whirlwind, Mother of the Wind,
Lend thy aid against her who sinned,
Carry with thee this magic ball,
Cast her from his arms for ever,
Bury her in the rippling river.”

The fireball comes dancing up to us as we are crossing the creek—river, I mean ; the horse shies and sends me hurtling into the water, where I turn into a water-lily. The prince goes away grieving, and I stay in the river and sing—

“ Alas ! alone and all forsaken,
'Tis I shall lie for evermore ;
My beloved no thought has taken
To free the maid who was so dear.”

But Rex was most provoking, he couldn't go away and grieve ; he said it was much nicer to sit on the bank and watch the water playing on my feet. “ You're doubling the tale, Peter,” he said, as he lifted his gaze from them for a moment, “ I can see two water-lilies.” Of course, when he would talk nonsense like that, the play broke up in disorder.

We lay on the grass in the afternoon, and he sang to me. He is always singing—it seems as if he can't help it—it bubbles up in his throat like speech in others.

“ Rex,” I said, “ why didn't you go in for singing instead of law—a professional, I mean ? ”

For once he answered me gravely : “ I did consider it, Peter ; some of my teachers advised it ; but well, you see, as I told you before, I'm ambitious, but I know my limitations. My voice is good, but it's not one of the three voices in the world ; moreover, the theatrical way

is thorny, and talent short of genius isn't much good there without influence. I have none. I've got nothing but my mother-wit to help me and my own brains ; and better a first-class lawyer than a third-rate singer. I shall die a Chief Justice yet ; mark my words, Peter, I'll arrive."

He sat up, and a grim hard look I'd never seen before came into his face, and yet it was familiar. All of a sudden it dawned on me it was the same sort of look that had been on Fran's face when he said " Women for pleasure, not to hinder," and I felt chilled, but Rex went on as if he'd forgotten me.

" I'll arrive, by Heaven ! I'll make 'em sit up. There's nothing between me and my work. I've no ties and I'll make none. I'll die in the woolsack yet. I've sacrificed much for my career, I'll sacrifice more ; nothing shall stop me."

For a few minutes he sat silent, gazing ahead with that triumphant visionary expression, it seemed as if he was miles away from me. Then he glanced at me and began to laugh.

" Meantime here's a remarkably poverty-stricken young barrister who's still fighting for his bread and butter and hasn't succeeded yet in overawing or astounding the court by his ability. It's nice of you not to laugh at his dreams, Baby Peter. Besides, why talk of bread and butter and ambition in the Forest of Arden ? Nothing matters here but love, does it ? Kiss me, Peter."

But I drew away from him. Somehow his lightness jarred on me. He lay silent again with his eyes shut, and when he spoke next it was in that grave, courteous, almost distant manner that I loved and feared at once. Loved because it seemed to set me above him in reverence, and hated because his reverence kept him from me. He spoke slowly ; even his speaking voice is melody.

" How like a cathedral this is ! These trees, trunk after trunk, are the great pillars supporting the lofty carving of the roof, the light filters in on us softened and

shaded as it does through the green stained windows, and for the slow chanting of the organ pipes we have the wind carrying the last notes of the birds that fall to silence in the creek's murmur."

"I should like to see a cathedral," I sighed.

"Yes," he assented, "it suits this fanciful, dreamy mood. It appeals to the artistic temperament, the emotional—the swelling song, then the silence; the rich voice of the preacher, the quaint imagery of the Book; the feeling of such a mass of fellow-men joining with you in worship of the invisible. But it doesn't do to give way to it," he added, the grim look coming back to his mouth; "it won't do for everyday life, it's each for himself and a short shrift for the blunderer. One must succeed."

Then again one of his sudden changes of mood came. He is like a day in January, now dust, now rain, now sun. He took my hand and drew it lightly, caressingly across his lips, and he began to sing the little gipsy song—my song, he calls it now. The sun was sinking down like a jewel in a mother-of-pearl casket. Rex turned his head and smiled at me, but his eyes were as unfathomable as the sky.

"Peter," he said, "if we were two little silver boats that could set out in that sky lake and sail across to a harbour on the shore of Paradise! Ah! Peter, why is a man fettered by his birth and," he paused and added gloomily, "by his own soul?"

The sun sank and he began to sing again, a new song, one I had never heard, a simple tune that ran out of his throat like water poured on flowers. It made me remember when I was little, and Fran hushed me to sleep in his arms crooning to me. As he sang the shadows lengthened.

"Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky.

"Now the darkness gathers,
Stars begin to peep,

PETER PIPER

Birds, and beasts, and flowers
Soon will be asleep.

"Jesu, give the weary
Calm and sweet repose,
With Thy tenderest blessing
May mine eyelids close.

"Grant to little children
Visions bright of Thee;
Guard ——"

The song ceased abruptly, and he turned over on his face and lay with it hidden in his arms. It grew dark very quickly. Suddenly he rose to his feet and held out his hands to lift me up.

"Rex," I said, "what was that?"

"My—my mother used to sing it to me," he answered in a low voice. "It is getting dark, let us go home."

And I have never had a mother!

CHAPTER XV

Do Men Do Such Things?

DI, I feel—no, I am too dazed to feel. Rex is going away! He told me at dinner-time to-day. We were in Arden all the morning, and he was his sweetest, and as we came back he told me. Dick comes back this afternoon, and he is going to-morrow.

Oh, Di! Do men do such things? How can he? For he loves me—you know he does. I don't understand it. I never said anything, I was too bewildered. I suppose he must go some time, of course, our idyll couldn't last for ever, not now that Dick has come back, but I didn't expect it so soon, and—— Di, he—oh, I can't bear to tell you—he spoke as if he was saying good-bye to me. How can he, how dare he! after this week? Besides, he loves me.

Why? Why? It seems so tangled. Have I blundered anywhere? But I've done nothing but love him, and is that a mistake? He was so strange when he told me; he didn't till we were just going to part, and he said it casually, almost carelessly; it seemed to mean nothing to him, he was like a stranger. What does it mean, Di? Will he forget me or will he come back? Oh, I must make him promise. I can't live without him now; he has taken my life and crushed it in his hands, he has no right to fling it away.

He is coming to ride with me again this afternoon, "The last ride together," he said and laughed. How dare he laugh! I could have killed him! He shall not go, he shall not, and leave me. I think my heart will break. What does it all mean?

He has never promised anything, of course, but oh!—men don't do things like that. He should not have made me love him if he meant nothing.

CHAPTER XVI

The Last Ride Together

THE last ride together ! I can't believe it's true, but to-morrow he goes, to-day is the last in our Forest of Arden. It has been a golden week, and to-morrow—no, I won't think of to-morrow. He said we would have a long last ride for the finish ; he was to come for me at six, for he would be busy with Dick in the afternoon, and we were to ride until eight—ride all the time, like Brown-ing's man and his lady, through all the old haunts ; and we would not get off, but ride and ride in the moonlight through the Forest of Arden.

As we cantered along we did not talk, I think we both felt too much. Then Rex slowed to a walk as we went up Lovers' Rise. It was very still. Even the moon crept behind the clouds for a while. It was a mackerel sky full of grey ribbed sand. He came alongside me, and Nugget paced demurely step by step with the mare, and Rex had my head on his shoulder. He began to say almost in my ear—

“ What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity—
And Heaven just prove that I and you
Ride, ride together, for ever ride ? ”

“ It would be,” I whispered ; and then his mouth was like fire, Di, and his arm almost hurt me.

“ Peter,” he said. “ Listen. There's something I must say, and you mustn't interrupt. Peter, I love you ! I love you ! I never knew what the word meant before.

I'm mad for you, every nerve and fibre in me cries out for you. I've fought against it, but it's no use. I never guessed the depth of it," he went on sombrely as if he were talking to himself. "I never knew I could feel like that, I didn't know it was in me; I've loved before, but not like this. That's why I'm afraid, afraid of myself. Peter!" he gripped me savagely, "there'll never be anyone else?"

"Never!" I said, and I loved him to hurt me.

"I think," he said, "I should kill him."

I think he would. His face frightened me a little. He was silent again.

"But, Rex," I said timidly, "why do you talk so? There never will be anyone else. You love me, and I——" the blood rushed to my face, and then I raised it proudly, "I worship you," I said.

"Peter, don't!" he almost groaned.

"You must go away," I said, "yes, I know, but you will come back and I will wait. It will be very lonely"—I bit back my tears—"but I will wait." Perhaps it was bold of me, but he is mine; I will not let him go; I cannot.

"If you were not such a child!" he groaned. "Why are you good?"

A queer little ache started inside me. I began to be afraid of something—I don't know what, but why was he so unhappy? I wondered if—— Suppose there was another girl in Adelaide!

"I'm glad you are," he said with a sudden change of mood. "But there is so much I cannot explain to you. I don't trust myself. I think sometimes I am bewitched, I can't think clearly. I must get away where your eyes can't draw the soul out of me. I don't understand. I had had all my life mapped out, and you make it seem nothing. I have no more resolution; I don't care for life, society, business, anything, when I'm with you. I'm mad!" he muttered. "I must get away."

"But you will come back, Rex, you will come back?"

"Yes, of course I will come back, I am sure I must.

I think I cannot live without you. But—it may not be soon. Peter, you can't understand," he said in a queer sort of voice, "it's no use your trying; we've been brought up differently, and you can't see the difficulties. I must reason it out calmly away from you. Perhaps by and by you will think me a cad, I don't know; it's all dark and confused yet, I can't see, but—Peter, whatever happens—if—only supposing I couldn't come back, you'll believe I loved you? You'll believe that I love you, that I always will love you, and that no other woman will ever fill your place in my heart? Peter, I love you!"

He pressed me close to him, and he was shuddering as if he were cold. All of a sudden he let me go, he almost pushed me away from him, and dug his heels into the mare. "Let's gallop all the way home," he said and laughed.

I laughed too, though my eyes were smarting. If he was going to pretend he didn't care, why, so would I! And so we jested and talked about nothing all the way home, but we weren't in the Forest of Arden any longer. He didn't get off his horse, he just talked feverishly till I had dismounted, and then he took off his hat and swung his arm round my neck and kissed me on the forehead. "God keep you, little girl," he said. "Good-bye!" And he went—but I saw his face was white.

And then the earth seemed to come up and hit me, and I slipped down because my knees trembled so I couldn't stand. I couldn't realise anything except that he had gone, and I felt he would never come back. And then his arms were round me. I clung to him madly.

"Rex!" I pleaded. "Oh, Rex! Take me with you."

"Don't, Peter," he said sharply. "I can't; let me go, Peter." He was trembling. "For God's sake let me go; don't cry like that."

"Then come back," I sobbed, for I was all unnerved. "Come back and say good-bye to-night," I begged, "just a little while; you won't sleep, and I shan't either. Let

us go for another ride together ; we will sit on Lovers' Rise and wait for the dawn of to-morrow. It's the last day of Arden, Rex—it's mine, mine till twelve. Come back, Rex ! ”

He tried to unloose my fingers about his neck, and his face was troubled. “ Don't ask it, Peter,” he pleaded in his turn. “ Oh, dearest, I want to—— But go inside quickly, Peter, go to your room—go, Peter, go ! ” and his voice was hoarse.

“ Not till you promise,” I said stubbornly.

“ I promise,” he said, his chest heaving. “ I'm a fool, but—I love you and—— God take care of us both ! ”

And so I am sitting here waiting. It is nearly ten, but he will come back. He promised. Why is he so troubled ? Oh ! but I could not let him go like that. I cannot live without him. I must make him love me so to-night, that he will come back to me from that other girl or whatever it is in Adelaide that is between us—bind him to me so he can never escape my memory. I have only such a little time, I must be my tenderest and sweetest, break down his cruel barrier, and make him forget everything but that he loves me. Only two little hours—father is asleep—oh ! I must be everything sweet that is in me to-night. I cannot think of life without him. Rex, my lover, my prince ! I can hear him coming. But why won't he take me now ? Am I not good enough for his wife ? I am very ignorant, but I would soon learn. I would learn anything for him !

CHAPTER XVII

Broken and Thrown Aside

WELL, Peter, you've gone and done it now. A pretty mess you've made of your life! Oh, Di, I *have* been a fool. But I didn't mean to be wicked—indeed, indeed I didn't. It was just that I didn't know. Oh, Di! It's wrong, it's cruel to bring up a girl like I've been brought up, and never tell her anything and let her ruin her life like I've done. What would Dad Harcourt say if he knew? I think I'm almost glad he's dead. I must be wicked, after all, to think that. But oh, Di! it's awful. I am as bad as any of those women he used to read about, and I promised him I'd be good too. But why didn't he tell me? I didn't understand what I was promising. Oh! I wish I could kill us both—because he doesn't really love me. He'll go away and leave me to face it alone. I didn't realise it last night as he kissed me good-bye, I was too stunned. I stood by the fence and watched him ride away, and just felt vaguely what I know to-day, that he will never come back again. I daren't tell father. Oh, Di! I am so lonely. I believe I'm going to cry. I do want my mother so. I wonder if she would forgive me? I wonder if when I was born she had known that her baby would turn out a bad woman, would she have strangled me? Are you very ashamed of me, little dead mother?

How queer it seems now, when I used to read about girls like myself. They always seem to get a bad time from the world. What an old fool the world is, and what a mean and futile coward, as if any cold-shouldering it can give them can matter after the hell they carry in their own hearts.

If I'd only known yesterday morning what was going to happen before the sun rose on another day, I think I would have killed myself. I wonder if I had better kill myself now? But I daren't, perhaps God would send me to hell. Father says there isn't any, but you can't be sure, and it wouldn't be fair unless Rex came too. I think I hate him. How queer it is!—and I loved him so yesterday. And it is all my own fault, too. If I hadn't made him come back! But I didn't understand. I never guessed there was any danger. Oh, God! why didn't I know? And I am to blame, for I tried to make him care more than ever, I maddened him—I—I! Could any girl but me have been such a fool, alone there by ourselves?

I must not blame him all, it is not just, but oh! he has no right to leave me now—he has not, he has not. He should have been stronger, or he should stay with me now. But he has gone! If I had only dreamt of it! We rode to Lovers' Rise, and sat on an old log and watched the moon gather her cloud-skirts round her and fleet over the sky hunting ground, and Rex's head was on my knee.

Oh! why couldn't it have lasted? But it was I who did the mischief. I didn't understand. Rex! Rex, you beast! And I love him so! Is it wicked of me to love him still? I'll try not to if I shouldn't. And I shall never hear his laugh again, never see his eyes soften again when they turn to me, or feel his great arm round me. Oh, no, no! Not that, I don't want to. I am glad I shall not see him again; perhaps he despises me now. Anyhow he is tired of me, for he has gone away—he went this morning; Dick is over now, he told us a little while ago. He didn't look at me while he said it, which was rather nice of him; but then I wasn't surprised, and I was almost startled to find I could talk about him quite naturally.

Father didn't say much, as usual, but he glared at me for a while and then cleared out. I went on talking calmly to Dick while I felt his eyes boring gimlet holes in my chest. I am getting clever at acting already; my life

will be one long deceit now. After father had gone I sat and stared out of the window, and Dick fidgeted about the room, and at last he blurted out——

“Look here, Peter, did he promise to marry you?”

It seemed to me as if someone pulled my face into a funny little twisted smile as I answered “Never.”

Dick heaved a sigh of relief, and said, “That’s all right then.” And it seemed to me as if my smile got more twisted still.

But Dick seemed uneasy, he kept glancing at me, and at last he said awkwardly, “Look here, Peter, it’s pretty rotten cheek of me butting in and all that, but hang it all, old girl, he’s not worth worrying over. I call him a dirty cad!” Dick went on angrily, “Making love to you just like he did to save himself from being bored up here—you needn’t think I was blind—and then clearing out on top of it. I wouldn’t shake hands with him when he went, I can tell you that.”

He paused for breath, but I couldn’t speak; Dick seemed to be tying something tightly round my throat. So it was only to prevent boredom, and I served to do that much!

“I say, Peter,” Dick said more gently, “you don’t care as much as all that, do you?” He put his hand clumsily on my shoulder, and his honest old eyes looked troubled. I wondered suddenly why I hadn’t loved Dick instead, then there wouldn’t have been any of this sick misery. “I ought to have warned you,” he said. “He’s a—a—rotter about women, only I didn’t know quite how to tell a girl, and—Peter,” his voice took a different tone, “if that devil’s hurt you, I’ll break every bone in his body.”

All of a sudden I knew what an animal at bay feels like. “Don’t be melodramatic, Dick,” I said, “and absurd.” And I spoke naturally enough, though the lie seemed to stick in my throat. But I can’t let Dick know.

“Cheer up, old girl!” he said, and then bent and kissed my forehead. That was the last straw.

"Don't!" I almost screamed, and then everything blurred suddenly, and I flung myself down and cried my eyes out. I never saw anyone look as silly as Dick did, and I had to laugh in the middle, but the laughing hurt more.

"Dick," I said, "you'll never go back on me, will you—never?"

"Don't be a fool, Peter," Dick said gruffly. "Come for a ride."

But I shook my head. I wanted to think things out first, and see how I was going to face the loneliness of life again, and father, and memory. But if I could only forget and stop loving him! Rex!—Good-bye, my dear, my cruel heartless dear. If you had honestly loved me I could bear it better, but to have been only played with and broken and thrown aside!

And now he will never come back.

CHAPTER XVIII

Love Ill to Win

OH, Di! I am lonely; the days crawl by like snakes, nasty creeping black memories. If I could only get away from here where everything reminds me of him, or if he would only write me. But, of course, he won't. If he cared for me at all he wouldn't have gone away; he's forgotten all about me by now perhaps. But how can he forget? I **wish** I could. I don't know how long it is ago. I suppose it must be weeks—I have lost count. It doesn't seem worth bothering. I am getting thin, too, and quiet now, or so father said.

He has been almost nice lately, although he rows with Dick as vigorously as ever. Dick wants him to send me away. I came in at the tail end of a fight the other day and heard Dick saying: "Well, if you don't send her inside a month I give you fair warning it'll be no use doing it at all. It's a damned shame keeping a girl like that mewed up here. What sort of a chance have you given her? By Heaven, sir, I wouldn't like to have to answer for it some day myself."

And for once father didn't rage back; he pulled his eyebrow and said almost politely: "I've been thinking about it."

"It's a pity you don't act instead of thinking such a precious lot," Dick retorted. "Perhaps when she's dead you'll wake up a bit."

I crept away again, but I wonder if Dick really thinks I'm going to die? I shouldn't care now, I'm not even frightened. I'm too miserable to mind. Anything would

be better than dragging on like this. I am dead really; I walk about and eat and sleep, but I am dead inside.

It's silly and sentimental and mean-spirited of me too, I suppose, to go on caring when he has treated me so badly, but I'm too tired to be proud now, and I want someone to love me so dreadfully. He was the only man I ever met who treated me like a girl. It was easy enough for him; what chance had I got? If there were someone else to stop me thinking! But there's nobody, and all day long the hatefulness of it poisons the food I eat and the water I drink, and the very sky above me is clouded by it. Surely I have been punished enough; and always at the bottom of my heart there's a sick dread—I daren't think that or I'll go mad.

Anything but that. I know now the blind terror of the hunted animal. You can't understand it till you've been hunted yourself. I do now. There's many, many things I can understand now I couldn't once. Knowledge you've paid for dearly bites deep.

Sometimes I want to scream it out at the whole world instead of going about a living lie. It must be dreadful to have the world's finger pointed at you, but in a way it's even dreadfuller to carry always on your conscience a big deceit; and nothing matters much after you've lost your own self-respect. Sometimes, when it haunts me worse than usual, I fling myself down on the grass and cry till my throat gives way and I only shake in silent sobs that seem to tear me in pieces for sheer shame of myself. Can't I ever atone for it? I know from books people would forgive Rex; why must *I* wear sackcloth all my life? I was no wickedder than he, indeed, indeed you know it was all his fault; but only me is punished. It's so tangled and queer.

I found an old book of Scotch poetry to-day at Dad Harcourt's. I've been reading a lot lately, to try and stop thinking, and I suppose, too, I just babyishly encourage myself in my silliness, because I read about love. I ought

to fight against it and do geography and sums. I did try at first, but it would come between me and the pages, and I gave it up, and now I just drift with my feelings. There's a queer sort of satisfaction in giving way; it's that that is the pleasure in being miserable, the feeling of unrestraint; and I think I'll die soon, so what does it matter?

The Scotch book has some queer poems in it; they're nearly all about people like Rex and me, and nobody seems shocked. Didn't people think it wicked once? Then perhaps it isn't really; but it's very puzzling. Why do people think it wicked now, or do they only pretend they do? I wish I could ask someone. I like one poem so much. It's a girl like me who has learnt her lesson too late, and she says:

"But had I wist, before I kis't
That love had been sae ill to win,
I had lock't my heart in a case of gowd
And pinn'd it with a siller pin."

Love ill to win! It does seem queer that the sweetest thing in the world should be the most dangerous, doesn't it? But I think it's such a pretty imagining. Wouldn't it be nice if we could lock our hearts up and just let them out for an airing when it was sunny and safe?

That girl seems to have thought things out a lot. I like this verse so much:

"Hey, nonnie, nonnie, but love be bonnie"
A little while when it is new,
But when it's auld it grows mair cauld
And fades away like morning dew."

I wonder why.

I believe Fran guesses about me, but somehow I don't mind him knowing; he isn't a bit shocked, and it is so comforting to feel he loves me still just the same. He said to me the other day when we were smoking by the old

log at the edge of the East clearing (we always have a pipe there about sundown, and a yarn): "Peter, you lof the lawyer-man?"

He said it in such an assured, matter-of-fact way, I just nodded meekly.

"Why he no tak' you with him?"

Then I remembered after all I am father's daughter and Fran is our man. "Mind your own business!" I retorted, puffing furiously at my cigarette. (Father won't let me smoke a pipe—I bought one once and tried, but I didn't like it much.)

Fran didn't take any notice of my rudeness; he just blew a few rings, and the crickets giggled shrilly round us. He clasped his distorted fingers about his knees and looked past me with such a funny sort of smile on his face. Then he nodded his head two or three times and spoke in Portuguese. He only does that when he is angry or sentimental.

"Ah! the foolishness of these little ones," he said. "When they are young the beautiful gods kneel at their feet and offer them the most precious of gifts, and they toss it aside for the tinsel rainbow ever just a little beyond; and when they are old and their bodies so sweet and their tender red lips are wrinkled, and their warm leaping hearts beat slow and heavily, they stretch withered hands to the mocking gods and proffer the tinsel back for the gifts they spurned many years ago—in vain—in vain, Peter! Paquita! my little one, there is nothing in all this big world so great and so precious as love. Love, Peter, while you are young; give, give, give, and do not ask again, for the pain now will be the solace of your old age and the bitterness of youth turn to honey in the years of memory.

"Love, Peter," he said suddenly relapsing into English. "Love and never regret not'in', then you be happy. Life is many colour—pretty—ugly—so many bits of glass—good—bad—the way you shake the dish. There is no good or bad—life is one big rainbow, Peter. When you

old you understan'. Not'in' matter. Not'in'—not even you, Peter; not me."

His voice died away in a mournful kind of sob, and seemed to shiver up to the stars just beginning to drift out from behind the gums. Nothing matters.

Perhaps it is true.

Rex!

CHAPTER XIX

Withered !

Dr, I had such a queer dream last night. I was in a big paddock covered with flowers, and it was full of girls and girls and girls. They all wore white dresses and carried big lilies, and they danced. I had a white dress on too, but I had fallen into a mudhole on the way and it was streaked and dirtied, and my lily had withered, and none of them would have anything to do with me.

I sat away by myself and stared at them unhappily. All at once someone came towards me ; it wasn't a man and it wasn't a woman, it just shone, and its eyes were so tender they loosened all the hatred and misery in my heart and turned it to tears that healed, not burnt.

In front of all the girls that knelt to it, it came to me and put its arms round me, and at that my robe became clean again and my withered flower revived, and when I said : " Who are you ? " It answered " Love." And I awoke.

I wonder what it means ? But somehow its caress seems to linger round me to-day ; I feel as if I were still walking in the shadow of that dream. I wonder if it means I am going to die and God will forgive me ? There can never be any more love for me again but His. Could God love even me ?

Father has been kinder lately. He said to me yesterday : " Peter, do you want to go away ? "

" No, thank you, father," I replied listlessly, and sat down at the window.

Beneath, Fran was rubbing down Nugget. I leant my chin on my hands and watched him. Father watched

me. Abruptly he said : " Where's some paper ? I want to write a letter."

I wonder if he is going to send me away, but what does it matter ?

Rex ! Rex ! I want you so.

I rode to the Forest of Arden to-day. The creek is dried up and the grass withered.

* * * * *

[And while a grey-eyed girl cried her heart out day after day on the withered grass shaded by the callous gums a ship was furrowing its way over the sea, and on its deck in the starlight, night after night, a man paced with a sullen face and bent shoulders.

The gurgles of laughter from dark corners did not stop his steady tramp.

The hum and snatches of conversation from the smoking-room passed by him unnoticed.

Up and down, up and down !

And again up and down.

" Fool ! Fool ! Fool ! " he muttered between his set teeth. And he stopped at the far end and stretched out his arms to where away in the blackness the Land of the Swan lay shrouded.

" Peter ! " he cried passionately. " Peter ! "

But not even an echo of his own voice came back to him. Always the sea and silence.

The smoking-room door opened and a head came out.

" Ware, will you come and make a fourth ? "

" Sorry," was the curt reply, " I'm busy."

Again he resumed his self-imposed march.

Now and again his hands would clench and he muttered broken phrases between his teeth.

A couple went past ; " To-morrow," one of them was laughing, " we'll be in Adelaide," and they passed on.

The man winced as if he had been struck.

" To-morrow ! " he almost groaned. " Pull yourself together, you fool," he added roughly. " You know you can't marry her. Think of your career. A bush girl !

A nonentity ! A beggar ! Do you want to saddle yourself at the beginning ? But, oh ! Peter, what a cur I am ! ”

His voice broke. Then he flung the cigarette that had gone out between his teeth, into the water with sudden passion.

“ Damn all women ! ” he said, and went below.

But in his sleep that night a man stretched out his arms and murmured again--

“ Peter ! ”]

BOOK TWO—THE GIRL, PETER

CHAPTER I

Miss Peter Delaney

DI, I've been born again. Peter Piper's dead, and here's Peter Delaney on a steamer, for the first time in her life, churning over this big wet paddock where the fishes graze, to Adelaide, South Australia. Di, do be pleased with me ; it's all so lovely and new, and I am so happy. Yes, I am, dear—don't you think I ought to be ? But Peter Piper is dead—dead—dead ! I shall say it over until I really and truly believe it. I am going to forget her, and everything—put it right away from me. God has given me a second start, after all.

But even now I can't understand it quite. It's all very mysterious, but it's too beautiful and happy for me to care. Di, I never knew people could be such darlings. Everyone on board is so good to me. I was dreadfully sick until to-day, and even now it makes me dizzy to watch some of the girls walking round and round and round the deck hanging on to the men's arms. I feel so shy of girls, but several of them have been so sweet to me and talked so jollily. I wonder if they would if—— Oh Peter, stop remembering. I shall not remember ; my life started two days ago.

The captain is such a dear ; he is a little, fat, dark man with sad eyes and an irresistible chuckle. He says he is my fairy godfather. He took me up on the bridge last night—and oh, the view ! There seemed only God

and me, no one between us. I've felt like that sometimes out in the scrub at nights.

While I stood watching the stars creep out unwillingly, as if the old lady who sweeps the sky were poking them out of their comfortable corners with her broomstick, he said suddenly to me :

"Where did you get your clear eyes from, god-daughter?"

I turned and looked at him wonderingly.

"You have the straight look that we get," he explained. "It comes from gazing so many years over measureless distance. I have never seen such clearness in a woman's eyes before."

"Oh! that," I said thoughtlessly, "is because I have always been a boy."

Di, I thought he'd never stop laughing.

But really it is quite hard to be a proper girl after so long—in little things, I mean, like what to talk about and how to put my clothes on and do my hair. Oh, I do wish my hair would grow quicker. It's got to that horrid half-way stage when I can't make it go up properly and it's too long to wear short. You know what I mean. But they say it looks nice.

But it's the talking puzzles me most. I listen to the other girls and try to copy them, but you wouldn't believe how queer their conversation sounds. I don't know anything of the things they talk about—theatres, and dancing, and people they know who are engaged. They never seem serious. The only thing I can talk about is books, and men don't seem to want to talk about them; they are always saying things that seem to mean they think me beautiful or they are in love with me. I couldn't understand it all at first, because I knew quite well they could not all love me, and I thought they were making fun of me, but I think I begin to see it now—it's the way they talk to all girls, and the girls only laugh. It must be a fashion to jest at love. I suppose there are fashions in talking as in everything else.

I am learning a whole lot of things I mustn't say ; I do wish I knew them all. But they are all very kind about it when I say things I shouldn't.

Di, I do like girls' clothes ; I never had such a lovely time in my life as shopping in Perth. Father gave me an awful lot of money and told me to get just what I liked. Di, have you ever bought petticoats, lovely lacey, frilly ones, and swishing silk underskirts, and openwork stockings ? It would make any sick person well to go shopping. Dick found it dreadfully dull. He took me down to Perth and put me on the boat ; he said he didn't care so long as he saw the colour coming back into my cheeks ; and we went to the Zoo, and the Palace Gardens, and the Pictures, and on the river in between-times. We were only there three days, and it was one big rush. I was staying with some old lady Dick knows ; he went to an hotel. I wanted to go with him, for I didn't like her much, but he said it wasn't the thing. That's another of 'em to remember.

Father wouldn't come down. Fran came to the train with me when I left, and cried : he said I looked lovely. Half the township had a fit at seeing Piper's boy transformed into a girl. I was feeling rather bad, but no one could help feeling pleased at making such a sensation. I should think even a man going to be executed could take a sort of mournful pride in his eminence.

Dick had got a girl he knew in Perth to choose some clothes for me to leave in. She had rather good taste, too. I wore a plain grey coat and skirt with a cunning lace blouse underneath, and a big black hat, and—don't shriek, Di !—a veil. Me in a veil ! I've got quite used to them now, and they are rather cute, though a nuisance to see through.

Dick and I both felt awful fools waiting for the train, and we scurried in like rabbits when it arrived. I was glad, because I didn't think I could have got any hotter, and my face was trying to. The girl from Mason's store was there—I was so glad. I turned round so as to give

her a real good view of my dress. I wondered if she remembered when I kissed her.

Father only shook hands with me at the house and hoped I'd have a good time. I was sorry to leave Nugget.

The only thing I do hate are the stays. They hurt, and I don't lace them tight either; I suppose it's because I'm not used to them. I guess I've just got to persevere. I argued the point with the shop-woman first, but I can see now, with the tight-waisty sort of clothes we wear (doesn't that "we" sound comic? but I'm getting quite possessively feminine already), you've got to have them, although the shop-woman said I had such a beautiful figure naturally, I almost didn't need them; but I expect she only said that to make me take the more expensive pair.

They're another thing I mustn't talk to men about. I suppose I shall learn it all some day. We were all sitting in a sheltered corner, and Glen (I'll tell you about him some day) said to me:

"What's up?"

"It's these wretched stays," I explained; "I can't get used to them. Have you ever worn them?" And then I went scarlet, for I saw by the way the girls looked I had put my foot in it again. But, oh! I could just have hugged Glen; he didn't look uncomfortable or even laugh, but he said in quite a matter-of-fact way, as if I'd made the most ordinary remark in the world:

"Only once, for some theatricals we had, and I thought them abominable things. I make quite a nice girl; don't you think I would?" he appealed to Lucy Rees, and drew the attention away from me. Wasn't it dear of him, Di? I just love him. His name is Glen Morris, and he's a lawyer; and he's been very nice to me; he comes and sits beside me, and doesn't even talk if I don't feel like it. He does talk such nonsense, though, but it's nice. He said to me this morning:

"Do you know why I adore you?"

I laughed outright and said, "I didn't know you did, but tell me why."

"Because you don't admire me."

I just laughed again, he is so absurd.

"I like your laugh," he said, shifting round to stare at me; "it gurgles just like water running out of a bottle. I shall call you 'Minnehaha, Laughing Water'—may I?"

"I'm sure I don't care what you call me," I retorted.

"If I thought you really meant it," he said, "I should call you 'Peter.' I never knew it could sound so beautiful before."

"Don't you like being admired?" I asked.

He made a grimace and blew some smoke up to the roof. "It gets monotonous," he said. "You see, I am the eldest, and the idol of the family. I was born clever. I wonder if you can realise what a handicap that is to a man?"

"Handicap!" I stared. "I should think——"

"So does everybody else; that's part of the trouble. When everybody insists on treating your misfortune as a blessing, not even in disguise—well!" he shrugged his shoulders. "Cleverness," he went on as if he were talking to himself, "inflates the brain at the expense of the heart. You get to thinking yourself of different clay to your neighbour, and expect Nature to treat your affairs with a bit more than usual consideration, something approaching the state of mind of the Dauphin, who thought it a slur on his dignity to be obliged to die like other men. Years of flattery, you know, can't fail to damage a man, however sensible he naturally is. You get a good view sitting on a pinnacle, but it gets lonely, and even then you can't bear to climb down." His eyes smiled at me. "Vanity takes queer forms."

"You do talk nonsense," I said.

"Yes," he agreed. "Suppose you come and beat me at golf."

I wish my hair had red shades in it like his.

CHAPTER II

Explanations

Do you know, Di, it has suddenly occurred to me I haven't explained to you yet how I come to be here. Last time I wrote I was moping at East Magnet, wasn't I? I wonder what Fran's doing now? He will miss me more than anybody. Poor old Fran! Life must be sad when it's running its last grains out. It must be just dreadful to have nobody want you, nobody's face get brighter when you come along. I wish I could have brought him with me, for he will be terribly lonely with only father, but anyway I expect Mrs. Danish would have a fit if I had.

I wonder what she's like. Isn't it fun guessing what people will be like beforehand?—they never are a bit what you fancy them. Why, I remember when Dick said a lawyer was coming up I—— There you go again, Peter! Will she be tall and thin, and have a sharp voice, and order me about, or is she fat and middle-aged and good-natured? Perhaps she is quite old, with beautiful white hair. I wonder if there will be any girls or boys? I wish there was a kiddy about three, I would love to play with it. There's such a darling young baby on board; its name is Molly, and it likes me. I think I could look at it all day, it is so perfect—its darling fat legs; Di, if you could only feel its wee ridiculous fingers holding your own. The first time it kissed me and slid its wet, messy, wee mouth down my chin I cried, and when I told its mother I had never nursed a baby before she cried too; and then Molly cried because we did, and that soon stopped us, because Molly has not learnt to cry like a lady yet.

Isn't that just father all over? Here I am going to

be plumped down on a family of complete strangers whom I don't know a thing about, and who, unless father's more communicative with other people than with me, don't know a thing about me either. I wonder how they view my coming? Do they like the idea or not? More likely not. Well, I can't help it, so it's no use worrying, and anything would be better than East Magnet.

I got a fearful shock when he told me. I had been out riding, and it was such a perfect day I couldn't help feeling a little less miserable than usual. The sun always seems such a gay old boy; you can't help giving him a smile in the end when he jollies you up so untiringly. Dick met me half-way home, and I could see he was just bursting over with news, but somehow, although I knew he was dying for me to ask him questions, I couldn't—I felt too tired. I was always tired. I can hardly believe it is me, Di, it is so heavenly to be alive again. My! you've got to be dead once to know the value of life.

"Peter," he said at last, "would you like to go away?"

"I don't think I care much now," I answered wearily "And anyway I never shall."

"Wrong for once," Dick retorted triumphantly. "You're going in a few days."

I turned in my saddle, and I believe it was then the wee-est thrill of life crept back in my veins.

"Dick!" I said.

He nodded like the clockwork soldier Dad Harcourt gave him one Christmas when we were kiddies.

"Where to? When? Who with?" I said in a rush, feeling a little bit more alive with each word.

"Your father'll tell you all about it when you get home."

I grinned sceptically—I knew what father's telling all about a thing meant. "Don't be mean, Dick," I adjured.

"To tell the truth, I don't know any more myself," he confessed. "I was giving him a bit of my candid opinion of him to-day——"

"Dick, you dear!" I broke in involuntarily.

"Turn it up, Peter!" Dick said gruffly. "Anyway, when I stopped for breath he coolly informed me you were going over to Adelaide in a few days. I nearly fell down in astonishment; then I thought I'd come and meet you. I say, aren't you glad?" His voice sounded disappointed.

"I don't know," I said. "I had given up hope, and it doesn't seem believable—but, yes, I suppose I am. Oh, yes, I am, Dick!" And by the time I got home I was quite excited, and Dick and I were talking about what we'd do when he came over to Adelaide, for he said he was coming soon, he'd sold his place.

When we rode up the track to the house Dick said: "I don't think I'd better come in again, Peter; the old man will have had enough of me for one day. I suppose you're not afraid?" he added; "he's pretty wroth over something or other, but I expect I should only make him worse."

"No, of course not," I said disdainfully, but all the same my knees shook as I went in, but perhaps it was only excitement. Father wasn't there, and I felt all my courage fizzle out. It's so disgusting when you screw yourself up to face something and it doesn't happen. I had prepared a whole lot of questions riding home I was going to ask him. I was determined to get at the bottom of things for once and for all, to find out who I was, and why I had been brought up so queerly, and what connection I have with the people I'm going to, but as I stood at the door watching father help Fran doctor one of the horses that was sick I knew I shouldn't dare. I did try.

He came in in a raging temper. "Pah!" he snapped, "the brute'll die all through that fool's meddling." ("That fool" meant Fran.) "Damn the thing!" he added furiously as he tripped over my saddle, "why don't you put your rubbish away?"

"Look here, father, let us understand each other,"

I tried to say, and I nearly wept with disgust when all that came out was: "Have you had tea?"

He grunted. I didn't know whether it meant yes or no, but I didn't want him to burst out again, so I was silent.

At the door he turned back. "I suppose Dick has told you you're going away?"

"Yes, who—who am I going to?" I answered meekly.

"Mrs. Danish," he said with a sneering laugh, "the charming, unblemished wife of Dr. Danish, physician and surgeon, Adelaide." And he laughed like a devil.

"For how long?" I hazarded.

"As long as you like."

"Oh!" I said, and shivered as he laughed again.

The moonlight came through the open door and lay on the boards like spilt milk; I watched it fascinated.

"But do they—will they mind—am I a relation of theirs?" I asked haltingly.

I thought father was going to spring at me. "Hold your tongue!" he roared.

I promptly did, and that's how I don't know any more now than I ever did. It's rather absurd for a grown girl to be wandering round the world like a lost dog, isn't it?

The only new bit of information I have is my name. I went to the outsheds to say good-bye (he had never mentioned my going away since that first night); he was mending an old saddle and wouldn't take any notice of me first till I said, "I've come to say good-bye, father." I spoke with more assurance than I had ever used before, but somehow the clothes I had on made me feel quite different. I did have such a job getting into them, too. Fran and Dick had to help button me up. And I was never so pleased in my life as when I saw father actually jump, and his hand went in an involuntary sort of way up to his hat. Then he seemed to catch himself back and hesitated for half an imperceptible second, but he took it off and made me an ironical bow.

"Am I allowed to congratulate you on the effect?" he said.

The words were nice enough, but the way he said them made my cheeks get hot.

He took me in from head to foot. "You were right, Dick," he said suavely; "it is unthinkable such a flower should be content to blush unseen. Of what avail are goods unless they go to market?"

"Father!" I cried, tears of anger in my eyes.

He looked at me with a twisted, sorrowful sort of smile. "Go and enjoy yourself, child," he said, quite gently. I believe if Dick and Fran hadn't been there he would have kissed me, but as it was he just shook my gloved hand (grey suède gloves, Di—I'd never had a pair on before), and then went back to his saddle. I suddenly felt sorry for father. I wonder why he has such a queer lonely life? Perhaps he is unhappy. But he never would let me love him. It's funny, though, how parting softens your heart; Dick says it's because you're so glad to get rid of people that you feel you like them better.

Then he and Fran drove me off to the station, and Fran cried all the way. Just as I went father said, "By the way, you'd better call yourself Delaney now, that's my real name."

So here's Peter Delaney; and here's Glen, too, coming to root me out. He does look nice, Di, and he is always thinking of tiny things to do for me. Of course I don't call him Glen except to you, but "Mr. Morris" is such a mouthful to write.

I guess I'll have to stop now. Good-bye, Di.

CHAPTER III

A Queer Situation

Di, how comic it is ! And how exciting, too ! Just imagine, Glen knows Mrs. Danish ! He says she's a jolly little woman, and there are two children, Dolly and Jack ; he doesn't know how old they are, but they are both grown up. That sounds nice. I'm so glad there's a girl. It was funny how we came to talk about it. It was after dinner one night. Di, I suppose it's awful to have to admit it, but I used to feel so uncomfortable at table for a while, there were so many spoons and forks and I was never sure I wasn't using the wrong ones.

After dinner Miss Rees and I went on deck together. She is such a nice girl. We talked for ages ; she was telling me all about girls, and when she was at school, and her sisters, and it was so new and lovely. She said she made most of her dresses ; I think she must be very clever. I should like to learn to sew, too. I was enjoying myself. Then Glen and another man came up, and after a bit the other man and Miss Rees went off together. I felt cross at being interrupted, although I like Glen, and I suppose I showed it, for he said plaintively :

"Why do you always bury yourself in a group of females when you know I want to talk to you ? Is it just perversity ?"

"Of course it's not," I said. "I like to talk to you, but I love girls."

"Well, I'm pretty enough for a girl," he reminded me ; "couldn't you love me too ?"

"Don't be silly !" I said, feeling less cross ; but the idea of calling his lean, lantern-jawed face pretty broke

me up completely. He has got a lean face—when he's profile on you can almost see the two sides at once. I like him.

He doesn't seem to talk much to the other girls. Miss Rees says he never does bother about them, and that's why it amuses her to see him with me. She knows him over in Adelaide, you see, though she says only very slightly; he never goes to dances, or at least only about once a year, so, as that's the rendezvous for the young, she doesn't meet him. She says he is supposed to be a very clever fellow. He got all sorts of first-classes and prizes when he was at the University, and people have made such a fuss of him he is getting spoilt. I haven't noticed he is spoilt. She says he was Stow Scholar, too, whatever that is; she seemed to think it something wonderful.

I'm glad he lives in Adelaide; perhaps I shall see him again after he leaves the boat. He told me, with that funny smile in his eyes, he wouldn't be surprised if I did.

"I mightn't," I objected. "Miss Rees says you never go to dances, and that's where people meet."

"Well," he said, with the same quizzical smile, "perhaps I might go now."

I never met anyone who could talk with his eyes like he does; they're as noisy as a phonograph sometimes. There is a phonograph on board; isn't it wonderfully clever? They laughed when I said I liked it, and told me it was very second-rate, but if they'd seen as little as I have they'd be pleased with little things too.

But what I am just dying to see are the moving pictures. When I told Glen he said: "Tell you what! we'll fix up a party and go as soon as we can. I expect they'll want to keep you to themselves a few days, but I'll ring up Dolly and find out."

"Dolly!" I repeated; "you know her well, then?"

"Pretty well," he laughed. "We were very thick when I was a college boy and she at school. I should think

I did know the fair Dolly. I don't see much of her now, though."

"What is she like herself?" I queried curiously.

"If I tell you you'll tell her back."

"I'm not a cad," I retorted; I felt a little angry.

"I beg pardon," he smiled, "I forgot you were a boy."

And we both laughed.

I've told him a little about Magnet, you see.

"Let me see. She's small, and fair, and wonderfully charming though not pretty. She's a hot friend, and has a trick of speaking out her mind regardless of consequences that makes her something of a terror to her acquaintances. A real sport, Dolly—I think you'll get on with her."

"And Mrs. Danish?"

"Pretty and spoilt."

"And the boy?"

"Jack—just an ordinary young devil. I don't know much about him or the doctor." He contemplated me a while. "It's rather a queer situation, being planted on strangers, isn't it?"

"Awful!" I sighed. "But I suppose she's an old friend of father's."

"I suppose so. Never mind, they'll be good to you. Who could help it?" he added.

Wasn't it nice of him to say that, Di? I hope he doesn't forget about the pictures. And I wonder if I will get on with Dolly? I do hope Dick will be over soon; he says he will, but he's going to Sydney first.

CHAPTER IV

The Last Evening

FUNNIER and funnier ! Lucy Rees knows the Danishes too. Now really, Di, that is peculiar, you can't deny. She doesn't live very far away from them, so I shall still see her when I live there. She says I must go round and play tennis on their court ; I don't know how, but she said I'll soon learn if I practise, but it'll burn up my complexion. Fancy anyone talking to me about my complexion, Di, isn't it huge ?

She says Dolly goes to the 'Varsity, that she's clever in a way. She's taking her B.A. course, though Lucy (she asked me to call her Lucy last night) doubts if she'll ever finish it.

"Why ?" I asked.

"She'll get married—most of us do."

"Are you there, too ?" I said in amazement. She looks so fresh and dainty, and not a bit studyfied. I wouldn't think she was any cleverer than me to look at her.

"I'm a medical student," she laughed, "third year."

"What a long time to spend at it !" I ventured.
"Do you like studying ?"

She laughed again. "Very much, except when I'm in love, then it's terrible hard work to keep your mind from straying."

"In love !" I opened my eyes.

"In love, little backblocks," she mocked prettily.
"Do you think medical students and B.A.'s don't fall in love as easily as other women ?"

I thought it over for a moment. "How very inconvenient," I said.

"That's the word I've been hunting for for years," she declared, wiping her eyes. "You've hit it at once, it is—inconvenient." And she went off in another peal of laughter.

"You know," she said presently, "you're the quaintest girl I've ever met."

"Oh!" I said, not quite sure how to take it.

"And," she added, "the prettiest. Come and play golf."

I asked Glen if she was very clever. He said he didn't know, but he believed she did rather decently in her exams., he didn't know much about her at all. I gathered he didn't want to.

"But why?" I urged. "She's very nice."

"I didn't say she wasn't."

"Well, what is it you don't like about her? I know, you think she shouldn't want to be a doctor."

"I don't like women studying," he admitted; "besides, she's the sort of girl who'll get married and throw it all away."

"But if a woman likes studying, why shouldn't she?"

"I don't know. But there's so many other things she can do."

"Such as wash dishes?" I suggested.

"Yes, and other things." He was perfectly serious. "There's some jobs women must do in the world—men can't do them—and men can do all the studying that's necessary."

"Then you prefer women without brains?"

"They can employ them in feminine ways."

"What is feminine?" I demanded.

"There you've got me," he conceded; "but don't let us spoil our last night by arguing. Admire the stars and I'll admire you."

"Why not admire the stars too?"

"Could I gaze at lesser luminaries when there's such a——"

We had to laugh, but, Di, it seems to me there's lots of

perplexities in being a woman. I almost wish I'd stopped a boy.

Well, we get into the Outer Harbour to-morrow morning. I suppose someone will come to meet me. Anyway, Glen and I made the most of our last evening together. Isn't it sort of sad breaking up any kind of association even for a better? We have been such a nice little party for so many days, and got so fond of each other, we almost didn't want to separate. But still I am not losing Glen and Lucy, anyway.

They celebrated the last evening with a concert, but we did not go. We leant over the ship's side and watched the moon having her bath; I wished I could believe it was really Cynthia slipping out of her gown spun of star threads and freshening her limbs in the tepid water. I pretended to Glen I could see the foam-maidens, with their beautiful green-blue eyes and hair that is sunshine in the day and moonsilver at night, dipping in and out of the circling lather the ship makes along her sides. I could watch it all day, it's like a soap advertisement.

But isn't it a pity we don't believe in these gods and godlings any more?—they are so pretty. Just think! If I could peep out of my porthole cautiously at sunrise and hope to get a glimpse of Aphrodite disappearing up to Olympus in rainbow bubbles, or see old Proteus practising his impersonation turns before breakfast. Glen says he would have made a tremendous hit at a classic Tivoli if they'd enterprising managers. He drew a handbill with a picture of Proteus riding in a nautilus shell.

TO-NIGHT!	TO-NIGHT!	TO-NIGHT!
PROTEUS	THE GOD	PROTEUS
GREAT ATTRACTION OF THE CENTURY		
IMPERSONATES ANY CHARACTER IN HISTORY		
OR MYTHOLOGY		
WITHOUT AID OF DRESS OR MAKE-UP		
OR QUITTING THE STAGE		
DON'T MISS THIS!		

Glen is a silly boy, but he always makes me laugh. Isn't it nice he should know Dolly so well? I wonder if he likes her more than he admits?

While we stood leaning on the rail a moonbeam came through a hole in the tarpaulin and danced all about and over us; we both tried to catch it, and got dreadfully excited over the chase. Can't you put lots of pleasure into tiny things? I'm beginning to believe every atom of pleasure you get out of a thing you put into it yourself. Joy is just a safe-deposit bank where you get no interest. It did look so funny when it got on the end of his nose, but it never stayed anywhere for a second till it came to rest awhile on my hair.

"At last," said Glen, "it shows good taste."

I looked at the water and sighed. "You don't know how funny it is being consigned like a bale of goods to absolute strangers."

"Is it still worrying you?"

"Wouldn't it you?" All of a sudden I realised how like a barnacle I was, somehow prised loose from his whale in the middle of the ocean.

Glen bent close and scanned my face. "If you cry," he said positively, "I'm going below."

Of course he always jests, but somehow I did want a little comforting then, and it hurt me. I wanted to say coldly that I hadn't any intention of crying, but my throat burnt too much. He shot another swift glance at me and said quite differently:

"It's rotten luck, but you're sure to like them, and you know we're sure to meet somewhere."

"Are we?" I said forlornly. I tried to smile.

He gave my hand a nice firm grip as we said good-night, and remarked casually:

"Anyway, I'll see you in the morning."

I'd forgotten that, so I went to sleep.

CHAPTER V

First Impressions

WE got in at the Outer Harbour quite early, and I flew up on deck to see Adelaide. I was so disappointed when I couldn't. There was nothing but a big shed which Glen said was the railway station, and miles of sandhills. It would have been depressing if the sea hadn't been so very, very blue, and the sun snapping like footlights all over it and the shimmering sand.

"Adelaide's miles inland," Glen assured me; "you've got to catch the train. Don't you go from this forming any fancy pictures of the Queen City of the South, or you'll be pleasantly disappointed. Adelaide's one of the prettiest little cities for its size in the world."

I had never seen Glen get excited over anything before, so I began to feel pleased again.

At breakfast I could scarcely eat anything. I was getting more and more frightened of the Danishes every minute. I wanted to run away and hide under my bunk. Suppose they didn't want me and were horrid? Di, it was just a most terrible feeling, and I couldn't very well explain it to Lucy or Glen without making father seem peculiar. But how *awful* I began to feel as the minutes went by and no one appeared, you can never guess.

I began to wonder if they would come at all, though, of course, it was horribly early still. Then Lucy Rees' people arrived, and she went home. One by one people came on board and collected their goods, but nobody claimed me. I felt more deserted every minute. At last I said to Glen: "Is anybody coming to meet you?"

"Great Scott! No." He laughed.

"Well, aren't you going?" I said with an effort, but I didn't want to seem to be keeping him:

"I'm in no hurry."

"It's awfully good of you," I said on a sudden impulse.

He looked uncomfortable, but replied: "Women always miss trains, you know."

I let it drop at that; he dislikes to have it emphasised that he is going out of his way to be nice.

All of a sudden he said: "Here they are!"

I turned quickly, and what looked like two girls stepped out of the saloon door, one dark and one fair. The steward was piloting them along to me. When they got closer I saw the dark one was really older, though at first she didn't look it. They got closer still, and I did feel shy and awkward.

I gave one begging glance at Glen—I didn't mean to, but I couldn't help it—but he only gave me a tiny smile and said: "Keep your end up," and then he turned and walked a little way down the deck out of earshot, where he leant over the rail and lit a cigarette.

I couldn't have moved for the life of me, but the fair one came right up and said with such a charming smile: "Are you Peter? I'm Dolly, and this is my mother."

"How do you do?" I said shyly. "It's—it's very good of you to have me." I raised my eyes from the deck and looked at the little dark one. Oh! she *was* pretty, Di; her cheeks were little round peaches, and dark baby curls crinkled round her ears; but her eyes were loveliest, a sort of grey hazel, like mine, only much more beautiful, and full of tears.

"Peter," she said with a sort of catch in her throat; "oh! baby Peter."

I think it was then I fell in love with her.

"Oh, you are like Jim," she said, laughing through her tears; "that same funny, solemn stare."

I suppose Jim is father, and then I felt as if I'd loved her all my life:

"Gracious! It's Glen," Dolly broke in suddenly; and there he was sauntering towards us.

"Glen it is," he agreed. "May I come and pay my respects? How do you do, Mrs. Danish?"

"Are you on board?" Dolly inquired. "D'ye know Peter?"

"Yes to both," he said. "I was just saying good-bye to Miss Delaney when you arrived. I guess I'll have to be off now."

"Motor up with us," Dolly promptly invited. "I forgot to say that's why we're late, the busted tyre—well, that was the identical trouble."

"Thanks," he said unhesitatingly, "but I'm in a bit of a hurry; I think I'll get the train."

I watched him go, and wondered why he wouldn't come with us.

"Come up and see us when you're not busy," Dolly called after him. "Peter will be glad to see a familiar face."

"Thanks," he called back, lifting his hat again.

It was very nice of her to think of that; I wonder if he will come. Then we all got into the motor; it was a big red one, and—heaven. I had not ridden in one before. It seemed as if we were birds flying through the air, and Mrs. Danish (she told me to call her Trixie, like Dolly does) and Dolly were so nice to me. I think I shall like living with them.

"We took the motor," Dolly explained, "because we thought we'd spend the morning driving you round and showing you a bit of Adelaide. Would you like it?"

"If you please," I said eagerly.

So they did. We went to town through Largs Bay. It was so nice to whiz along with the air stinging faintly of salt in your eyes, and the edge of the big ocean, on whose heaving old chest we'd been bumping up and down for days, to sing good-bye drowsily along the beach.

I was sorry to leave the captain. He shook my hand

heartily when I went to say good-bye to him and said :
" Good-bye, little god-daughter ; be good."

He didn't know how sharp his jest was.

Adelaide is just a beautiful place ; we drove through its nice broad streets and past the Parklands. I think the big stretches of green bordered with trees look so cool and countrified within three minutes of the heart of the city. And then the little gardens of scarlet and purple dotted among the close-kept lawns and the bank of colour on the Torrens side, and the low riot of gold and green in the shade of the plane-trees before the Oval. And the other beautiful spot by Brougham Place, and the drive through the Park under those silent hanging trees, which seem so cold and contemptuous, as if they declined to take the least notice of anything so small and insignificant as we slipping along in their sun-specked shade.

We lunched at Arcadia because Dolly said it was more amusing than at home, and anyway there would be nobody but our three selves at lunch, as the Doctor and Jack didn't get home till dinner.

I loved to sit and look at the crowd, it was full of people ; so many pretty girls too. I did just worship their frocks. All one bewildering noise and bustle. We motored through the Hills all the afternoon, and after dinner Dolly sang to us and we went to bed. She has a clear, sweet voice.

Good-night, Di, I'm yawny and sleepy ; I'll tell you more to-morrow.

The house is called " Curranjee."

CHAPTER VI

Getting Acquainted

It's to-morrow now. I woke up to find the sun conducting a tour of investigation round my room, so I joined in. I felt as much an intruder as he. It's far too lovely a room for me; it's blue and silver-white. A matting floor with dark blue rugs, a big blue papa arm-chair and a little grandson chair, plain blue wall-paper with a blue and silver frieze of swans, blue curtains with a tiny pattern in silver across the top and bottom, a hugest huge mirror, and all sorts of silver scent-bottles and things on the dressing-table, and the washbasin and jug were blue and swans, the delicatest, softest shades you ever saw.

I felt exactly like a powder-puff in a satin box. I was glad I had bought some beautiful nightgowns in Perth, I didn't feel so out of place. And the very loveliest thing of all—guess, Di!

Outside my window, curving round the corners and making the scent sprays curl up and wither in disgust, was a big creepery bush of jasmine. I gave a little yell of joy, then I gathered as much as I could in my arms and kissed it. I have never seen any before, but it was always a favourite of mine. The very nicest heroine I ever read about in a novel used to love it, and so I said I would make it my pet flower too.

But doesn't it smell like beauty and sadness and dreams all in one?

While I was wondering if I could ever be unhappy again a knock came at the door, and Dolly poked her head round.

"You don't mind me, I suppose?" she said easily, following her head by the rest of her.

"No," I said, feeling rather shy of her but not wanting to seem ungracious. "You—you are very kind."

"Not a bit," she commented, curling herself up on my bed like a doll, "only curious."

She sat there and sucked her little finger. Between her and Mrs. Danish I began to feel as if I'd tumbled into a doll's house. They are both so different, yet both so small and self-possessed, you feel as if they ought to be babies, but they are not.

I hadn't had time to study her before properly, so I did now, or else it was that the impressions I had been gathering all along the line suddenly crystallised.

You could hardly call her pretty, her mouth is large, but she has a nice little tilt at the end of her nose; and when she laughs you forget almost what she looks like, you only think she is a nice girl.

After contemplating me a long time she shook her head lugubriously. "My worst fears are realised," she sighed.

"Why—what——" I stammered.

She went on without noticing me. "I was afraid you might be beautiful; you're worse than that, you're exquisitely pretty."

"Oh!" I said, feeling hot.

"And you can blush," she said; "this is adding insult to injury. Never mind, you'll soon forget new."

"But Miss Dan——"

"I beg your pardon!"

"Dolly, then; I—please I——"

"I don't know whether to hate or adore you," she went on placidly, not taking the least notice of my uncomfortableness, "but if you promise to leave me at least one pal at whose manly shirtfront I can weep out my woes I'll promise to adore."

"I don't think you need make fun of me," I protested, a little hurt.

"I'm not. You'll understand us by and by. As a matter of fact I came in here to make you better acquainted with the family. I'll answer any questions you like to ask. Fire away!"

I stared at her helplessly; of course there were thousands of questions I wanted to ask, but I didn't like to. She pulled her gown closer round her.

"Never mind; of course you're shy. But I'll gratify your unuttered curiosity all the same. First of all I'll reassure you. There's no more of us than you saw yesterday; we didn't hide any of 'em away in cupboards for awhile to break it to you gently. Imprimis, then, there's father, and plenty of him, he's the autocrat of the breakfast and every other kind of table in the house; Trixie is our baby, I'm the electric button that sets everybody else in motion, and Jack—I call Jack 'the lover.'"

"Oh!" I said. "Because——"

"Because he's in love, of course. He's got the complaint badly, too—two girls at once."

"Oh!" I said again; I didn't know what else to say.

"It's a sad trial having a brother in love, it's worse than being in that mournful condition oneself. Naturally I have to help, and two is so awkward; I have to be sweet to them in turns, but, instead of loving me for the times I help her, each hates me for the times I help the other. It's most inconsiderate of Jack."

But anyone can see she adores him.

"B-r-r!" she gave a little shiver. "Well, I must run away and dress now, it'll soon be breakfast. I suppose you don't want to go out to-day, do you? I'll show you round the place, and to-morrow Trixie's going to take you shopping. She's got a list, that requires two able-bodied men to lift, of things she intends to buy you."

"Oh, but," I said awkwardly. "I have—an—an allowance. Father said I was to go to his lawyers. I—I couldn't let Mrs. Danish——"

"Call her Trixie, Peter, as she told you, and don't be too stiff and iceberg-y. You know we're forty-second

cousins one hundred and one times removed, or something like that, so there's no need for all this ceremony. And about the other. You might let Trixie give you things if she wants to. Why, her chief joy in life is spending money, and she's been looking forward to this ever since she knew you were coming. I think you might let us be nice to you when we're trying so hard. Of course, if you don't like us——"

"Oh dear!" I said helplessly:

Dolly smiled approval. "That's a much better frame of mind. Well, ta-ta! See you at breakfast."

We were all of us much more at home at breakfast, and then Dolly and I and Trixie went off to look round the place. The Doctor and Jack had gone off to work. Jack is a medical student, like Lucy.

Di, it was like you read about in books. They have nine or ten acres round the house, perhaps more; beautiful lawns in front, and flower-beds from a distance look like a jeweller's window; high hedges down which cunning twisty paths go, so that you're always losing sight of the people in front.

"It's a marvellous piece of consideration!" Dolly explained. "I'd like to meet the man who laid out this garden, he knew that even two and two make four embarrassments."

Dolly certainly makes you laugh. How beautiful life is for some people!

And at the back they have what they call the lily-pond. It's a biggish artificial lake overgrown with water-lilies, and great clumps of arums gazing coldly at their reflections on the edge, and the whole ground near planted with gums and willows under which are cunning little seats. I fell in love with it at once. I shall often go and sit there.

Oh! why—why didn't father send me earlier, before—I wonder if they would let me stay if they knew about Rex? Come, Peter, you promised to forget.

After that we went round the stables and the fowl-

yards. I enjoyed it immensely. I love animals; there was one beauty in the stables who resembled very strongly my old Nugget; I kissed his dear velvet nose. I like fowls too; Emma, Dad Harcourt's housekeeper, used to have a few, and she was as proud of them as could be. I used to nurse the chickens.

Trixie says if I like them I shall have a yard all of my own; Wilkins is to let me choose half a dozen hens, and I can set them, and do exactly as I please with them. Isn't it darling of her? I think I shall love her so much.

It seems as if none of them can do enough for me. Even Jack brought home a fox-terrier pup to-day. I was too surprised to thank him for a minute; he looks so lazy and casual I didn't think he would have bothered to do a thing like that.

When I tried to thank him he just drawled, "Glad you like him—he's pretty well bred," and cleared.

The pup's a fat white worm, balanced on four unsteady props, and every time you go to pat him he falls over. I've named him Foxy Bill.

CHAPTER VII

Glen's Party

Dr, I've had the shock of my life. What do you think ! Dr. Danish is Trixie's second husband. Dolly and Jack's name is Denton. Of course there's no harm in it, only again of course it never occurred to me, and somehow the idea of Trixie being polygamous or polygandrous or whatever it is, seems incongruous. I don't care if these words aren't technically right, for they are in feeling ; for I don't see your husband is any less a husband because he's dead ; he may not exist actually any more, but in so far as he had an existence on earth he's in memory as he was when he died, and when he died he was your husband.

I know father doesn't approve of second marriages. Perhaps Mr. Denton was a great friend of his, and that is why he sneered at Trixie. I don't see how he could, anyway ; she's a darling, and she is so good to me. They get kinder every day.

My fowl-house and yard will be ready quite soon. I am having new ones put up exactly as I want them, and I have chosen six hens, brown Leghorns ; Wilkins says they are the best layers. One is going broody now ; I shall set her. The finest of them all is a big fluffy hen with a fierce yellow eye and a dowager dignity ; Jack has named her Maria ; Wilkins says she is a fine sitter. I spent all this morning pottering round with them. I do like fowls.

Life here is lovely, every day there is something fresh to do. I'm not even tired of shopping yet. And it's such fun doing the block on Saturday morning. I like to

walk down Rundle Street with Dolly; Dolly says she likes walking down it with me too, she suns herself in the rays of my reflected glory. It's very silly of her to say that, but people do look twice at me sometimes, and I know it's not because I'm badly dressed—Trixie sees to that.

Glen didn't forget about those moving pictures. Wasn't it nice of him? I thought he had. He didn't come near us for ages—nearly a fortnight, I suppose—although Dolly had asked him, and I thought he couldn't want to see me any more, when one afternoon Dolly came home and said:

"I saw Glen coming back from lecture, Peter; he wants to get up a party and let us go to the pictures. Shall we?"

"How jolly!" I said.

"I'll ring up the others, then, and we'll go next Saturday night. He says you and he arranged it on the boat. Did you?"

"He did say he'd suggest it to you," I answered hesitatingly. "But if you don't want to——"

"What on earth makes you think that? It's fun, a lot going together; we'll make up a dozen, that's enough. You see, in things of that sort, if there's too few you've all got to talk in one little lump and you can't get separated, which, if you're fond of one in particular, is dull; and if there's too many you can't get a word across to anyone but your partner for the evening, which, unless you are particularly fond of him, is dull likewise. Eight or a dozen is the happy medium. Let's see, there'll be Ralph and Glen and Jack and us, and I'll have to ask one of the Dots for Jack, I suppose. I'll have to ask him whether it's to be Lavington or Parks this time; on one dreadful occasion I asked Dot Parks without consulting him, and there was a temporary coolness *in re* the other Dot. It was an awful night." Dolly fanned herself at the remembrance. "Both of them were furious with me for being asked, and the other Dot furious for not being."

She sighed. "It's a trying world! Well, I'll choose some others later. I must go and do philosophy now."

"What is philosophy?" I asked.

"Trying to get yourself to believe nothing ultimately exists, or if it does it couldn't logically."

"Dolly," I said, "do you like studying?"

"Of course; besides, if it gets dull one can always adore the professors—that's a whole education in itself."

"But don't you like going out and tennis better?"

"I like 'em both," Dolly returned promptly; "one lends a sauce to the other."

She is a human dynamo, and how she can talk!

But Saturday night was fun. After all we went to the Dandies, not the pictures. It was such a hot night, we all agreed when we met we would sooner go to something out of doors. It is easier to talk in the dark too, and it was so pleasant to have Glen again.

He asked me if I was enjoying myself, and when I said yes, that he was glad to hear it.

We were quite shy of each other at first, it seemed such a long while since we'd met, but it soon wore off, and we were chasing the words off each other's lips. There was another girl there who seemed to know him pretty well, at any rate she called him Glen, and she kept trying to take his attention away from me—I'm sure I don't know why, for she had a very nice man to talk to herself, but on the least excuse she would butt into our conversation. Glen answered her politely every time, but every time he talked to me again. I was rather pleased.

Once she asked him how Freda was enjoying herself in Paris. Dolly says Freda is his sister. How queer! it never occurred to me before that he must have brothers and sisters and aunts, it was always just himself. It is almost disconcerting for the moment. He is such a lone hand. It seems in the fitness of things he ought to be an orphan. Dolly says his people are rather rich. One time in the evening I asked rather casually, oh! ever so casually, Di (I'm very much of a girl now), why he hadn't been near

us yet. He replied for the extremely simple reason he hadn't been asked.

"Dolly asked you on the boat," I contradicted.

"Oh, that," he said, "was just vague politeness; I haven't been to their place for ages. I can't suddenly turn up on that, you know."

"I see," I said, rather blankly. Then an idea struck me. "If Dolly asked you a particular day," I queried, studying my handkerchief spread out on my knee, "would you come?"

"It would depend," he answered gravely, "on the day." But somehow our eyes met and we both laughed. Then I knew he wanted to come.

It was rather comic that as we were wishing good-bye Dolly should say: "By the way, Glen, if you're doing nothing special next Saturday, come up to tea."

So he's coming. I'm quite looking forward to it. I've got an adorable new frock I'll wear. It's blue. He told me blue suited me.

I forgot to say the Dandies were awfully clever; it was a most enjoyable evening.

CHAPTER VIII

Glen Comes to Tennis

I'VE been sitting out in the sun all the morning reading by the lily-pond. I love that place, the willows talk to me. I read and Foxy Bill conscientiously endeavoured to gnaw a button off my shoe.

I am glad to say his efforts were not crowned with success. He's growing so fast you can almost hear him doing it, and he paddles round after me everywhere. I beat up raw eggs and milk for him, I expect that's why. Cook says it's shocking waste for a dog, but Trixie doesn't mind.

I think she is prettier every day, and she is so kind to everyone. She is a little selfish, but you can't expect her not to be when everybody adores her so. Dolly always calls her "Baby" for a pet name, and so do Jack and the Doctor. She is much more that to them than their mother. I wish she were mine too. Sometimes I almost think she is; you could almost imagine sometimes she likes me more than Dolly, only of course it's absurd. I don't see why she cares about me at all, but oh! I love to know she does.

I think I'm too happy to live. I'm going to learn dancing to-morrow, they start—dances, I mean—in a few weeks. Some people called Marnham are giving a big one on the eighth. I have never met them, but they have asked me with Dolly, which is very nice of them. It's to be in a marquee on their lawn. I feel horribly excited about it all. Me at a dance, Di! Isn't it a joke? I'll be just like the girls in books I used to read about.

The only thing is, I did want spangles. Do you re-

I love being up quite early when there's no one about, and to watch the things in the garden wake. Everything was cold and crisp and the lawns white with frost. It was as if the flowers had been having a big dinner-party and forgotten to clear away the cloth. They all looked sleepy and dissipated too ; one fat daffodil with his stem bending under the weight of his cup reminded me of a wobbly-legged picture-postcard gentleman with his top hat all awry.

Bill and I raced each other twice round the lily-pond to get warm. Bill won by a length, but honesty compels me to admit it was because he won't go farther than that away from me. I felt ridiculously happy.

Then I went to see how my fowls were getting on. Of course it was too early to feed or do anything for them—punctuality is most important, Wilkins says, with fowls—but I sat on the fence and admired them. Did I tell you before, my own little yard is all fixed up now ? Maria and the other hens are all safely installed. I've got some chickens out already, and another on a sitting of ducks. I'm going to sell them to the butcher. Trixie thinks it's an awful thing to do. But she never stops me doing anything I want to ; when she doesn't like it she argues till she's tired and then says : " Oh, you are like Jim," and then I know I can go straight ahead.

Apparently there's some use in having had an obstinate father. I do think life is so jolly here, everybody is as kind as kind. Lucy Rees asked us over to tennis at her place yesterday, and we had such a nice time. I'm beginning to be able to hit a ball or two now ; they say I'm making tremendous progress, but then, of course, I've a lot of strength for driving power.

Glen was quite surprised at my improvement. He was there too. Lucy teased me about it ; she said I was taming the savage. Of course that was ridiculous ; he went to her place because she asked him, and he likes tennis. He came home to tea with us after. He has been several times ; he comes whenever Dolly suggests it in

the least. I believe we shall stay friends after all. He is a very nice fellow indeed, and why shouldn't a man and a girl be friends?

A lot of men seem to like Dolly, and she says they're not in love with her. I think one of the nicest of them is one called Ralph Manners; he is dark, and a clergyman, but you'd never think it. He is a sort of forty-second cousin, too.

That is what Trixie tells people I am, but I don't believe it. If that's all, why won't she tell me any more about myself than father? She won't, though; she evades questions ever so delicately. Finally she said, "Dear, if your father doesn't want you to know things, I can't tell you, can I?" Of course that clinched it.

Another time she sighed: "You mustn't be too hard on Jim, Peter; he's had a sad life, poor boy."

Fancy calling father a boy! I nearly laughed.

He half lives up here—Ralph, I mean—he simply makes me call him Ralph, Di, so you needn't think I'm cheeky, and it seems quite the thing with him. He is so simply friendly and boyish, I feel more like a brother to him than I do to Jack.

Oh! everybody's good, and life's adorable, and I'm learning dancing.

CHAPTER X

Rex Reappears

DI, I went to church to-day, it's the very first one I've been inside, and I did enjoy it. Somehow it made me feel good again, like Dad Harcourt used, only he always said he didn't believe in church. Trixie screamed when I told her; she said: "Why, you've had no religion given you at all, you awful little heathen!"

"Yes, I have," I said indignantly. "Dad Harcourt taught me the Commandments and 'Our Father.'"

"And is that all you ever learnt?" she said in a scandalised tone.

"Yes," I said a little crossly. "Dad Harcourt said that was enough religion to carry any man through the world; if that wouldn't keep him straight nothing in the religious life would; it's quality counts, not quantity."

"What a peculiar thing to say!" Trixie said dubiously. "Well, of course, I know a lot of people go in for free-thinking now, so you won't be thought odd if you don't go, but we have sittings and I should like you to go occasionally—it looks better."

"It seems funny to go and talk to God for the look of the thing," I objected.

"My dear Peter," Trixie said, "I wish you wouldn't say such extraordinary things. It's all very well to be bizarre at times, it's very taking, but it's not nice to jest on sacred subjects. Some of us are still old-fashioned enough to respect religion."

"But," I protested, a little bewildered, "I wasn't jesting."

"Very well," she said with a gracious air of over-

looking it, "don't let us say any more about it." Really. Di, she is the quaintest little featherhead I *ever* saw, but you can't help loving her, she is so pretty and sweet, for all her foolishness. I suppose she was born like it. Dolly adores her, though she winked at me as she went out, It's funny how you can laugh at anyone quite tenderly, and love them all the better for the laugh. The Doctor loves her in just the same indulgent way, and so does Jack.

But Dolly and I went this Sunday. It was a dear little church. I wanted to go to the Cathedral, but Dolly wanted St. Augustine's, because the boy who reads the lessons is a divinity student at the 'Varsity and adores her. "Think how good-natured it is of me," Dolly urged with one of her wicked winks; "it glorifies the whole day for him to see me listening with rapt attention while he does his elocution exercises. I feel it my duty to go out of pure philanthropy."

She made me laugh with nonsense like this all the way there. It seemed so funny to be dressed in your nicest clothes so early on a Sunday morning; and everybody else we passed looked so starched and clean, it made you feel like a mental washing-day. I suppose Sunday is, for some people.

It seemed too bad to go inside out of the glorious sun-bath, but when your eyes got used to the dimness it was so cool and consoling. The lower parts of the windows were green glass, and that made such a nice unreal atmosphere; and then the lovely stained pictures, where angels of the funniest anatomy and big feet played with sheep and monograms. There were I.H.S.'s, too, all over the place. I asked Dolly what they meant.

"In His service," she whispered.

It seems you mustn't talk out loud in church. I asked Dolly why, and she said she didn't know. There seems such a lot of things in the world people do without having a reason.

I liked all the brass things about the church, too, it

looked like board ship, so clean and shining. There was a glorious phoenix reading-desk (that signifies the re-birth of the soul, I know, because I read it in some old Greek stories), and the sweetest red hanging covered with gold crowns, and flowers all round the railed-off part where the choir sat:

I did love the altar with the big bunches of white flowers, and the slim candles burning so bravely against the daylight, and the dim peace of it all; it made my eyes feel hot and wet and my throat choky; I wanted to cry because I felt so miserable and happy at the same time, while the long drawn sigh of the organ quivered and sobbed itself to sleep along the star-pointed roof. It seemed as if God were whispering to us, telling us not to be frightened, He understood; then all of a sudden the walls seemed to be folded in a mist, and I saw big gums, and thick brushwood, grey and green in the sunset glow like shot silk, and heard old Fran's voice moaning in the organ tones—"Not'in' matters, Peter, not'in'—not me, not you." Oh, God! if it is true! A big tear gathered in the corner of my eye and splashed down on the prayer-book Dolly had lent me, and she looked up sharply.

"Peter," she said in a fierce whisper, "if you're going to make an exhibition of yourself in church I'll go out and leave you. Can't you behave when you come out? Try and think of something funny."

I did try obediently, and looked round the church, and then—my heart gave one jump and stopped perfectly still, everything swam in front of me, and I seemed to hear a dim little voice miles away from nowhere say, "Peter, are you going to faint?"

Then she started pinching me viciously in the tender part of my arm. The seats were covered at the back pretty high up, and no one could see us. Of course that brought me back quickly, and I kicked her ankle to pay her out. That restored her to good temper. Dolly is rather like Trixie in some ways, she does above all things

hate a scene in public; she quite welcomed my kick, although it must have hurt her, as showing a return to a normal state of mind.

But who do you think I had seen, Di, sitting near the lectern?

Rex!

I didn't dare look again for a long while; I was in a cold perspiration lest he should look up and see me. I kept my eyes glued on my feet, and tried not even to think of him in case that should make him turn. Then after a while my curiosity got too strong for me, and I took another peep under my eyelids. I could see him quite well, his face was sideways on to me. He hasn't altered. And I felt so funny, just as if a sausage machine was where my stomach ought to be. Have you ever felt as if you ended at the waist? I am certain if I had tried to stand on my legs I could no more have managed them than Dolly's.

I felt suddenly like someone on a mountain might, when a volcano breaks out under his feet, to think I can never escape from that Peter who died. And I was almost forgetting. Perhaps it is wicked to forget, but it was so long ago, and no one can be unhappy always when the sun shines and people are kind. Oh! I wish I hadn't seen him; it brings it all back. I can never meet him; but suppose I have to? What shall I do, and how will he face me? Would he dare shake my hand and pretend we had never met? And, if we do, we are sure some time to betray ourselves by a chance remark.

It's horrible! Why must he cross my life again? Peter, Peter! there'll never be any peace for you till you're dead; and I don't want to die, I can't bear the thought of it now. Life could be so glorious if I were only like other girls. But they have always been sheltered from harm, while nobody cared what became of me. And I got my chance just too late.

After a while I watched him quite calmly and with quite a detached sort of feeling, as if he belonged to the

story of some girl in a book. I felt no emotion at all. That's queer, isn't it? I didn't even hate him, only—whenever he turned or moved a little shudder ran through me, just as it always does at a snake or anything creeping.

To think he may be mixed up in my new life spoils everything. It was all so bright and jolly and new, and I had almost coaxed myself into believing I didn't belong to the old Peter over in the West at all, that I had somehow come into existence here, grown up, just as I am. In a way they treat me as if I had.

I feel that there's a mystery somewhere, but no one comments on it, and my being here is taken so much as a matter of course that I've almost come to take it in that light myself, and forget that, over near the setting sun, there's scrub, and a tumbling house, and a dead girl who casts a shadow round me still. I wonder if Fran ever misses me?

. . . . And all of a sudden I heard the dean saying :
“The peace of God which passeth all understanding
: : : be amongst you and remain with you both
now and evermore.—A-men.”

CHAPTER XI

The Tricks Luck Plays

It's Wednesday now, and I've had time to think things over. I'm getting back to my reasonable self again, but Sunday did shake me up so that, till last night, I seemed flung back again to those first dreadful weeks. Oh! why must Rex live in Adelaide, of all places—or why must I?

Peter, when will you learn it's no use complaining why, you must handle facts? Here he is, and here you are: now, calmly and sensibly, what are you going to do about it?

What can I do?

Nothing, of course; sit down and wait for things to happen. Oh, whatever's going to come, let it come quick! It's suspense that breaks your nerve.

I will think it out soberly, I will, and I won't get hysterical and silly. It can't be helped now; but I was so happy, and since seeing Rex everything leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. Now, Peter, take a grip on yourself; he shan't spoil my life twice. I won't think about him, I won't consider him. Why, I may never meet him to speak to; he mayn't be in Dolly's set at all.

But it's no sense building on that; I've got to be prepared for any tricks my luck may play, even to his turning out Dolly's greatest friend. That is rather an extreme guess, but nothing is impossible. Still, if she knew him well, she'd surely have mentioned him before now.

But how, how, if we have to, shall we meet? Well, it's no use laying elaborate plans beforehand. I must just be guided by circumstances, and him too. How will he

take it, I wonder, if he has any notion I am here ? Will he keep his head, or betray us both by his face ? Perhaps he won't recognise me again, but I'm afraid that's too much to hope.

I never knew before how much I hated him. I thought I was miserable when he left me, but that was mainly because I loved him, I wasn't really bitter ; but now I'm just beginning to realise what life means, what it's worth to a girl, and he—he's cheated me of my girlhood. He took from me a thing I never knew I had. I'm like someone who keeps a piece of glass shut away in an old case ; one day the glass is stolen, and then she finds it was a precious diamond.

For it isn't only little Peter Piper, the bush-girl, he's ruined now, it's Miss Delaney the débutante.

Débutante !—me !—oh, what a grim joke !

Yes, let's see the funny side. God keep my heart always laughing, don't let me get a teary old grumbler. After all, I've a very, very great deal more than some poor girls to keep me happy.

I will smile ; it's the best thing to do, isn't it ? It's a waste of courage and energy to keep eternally regretting. If you've made a blunder once, learn by it not to make another. Life seems to me like that egg-and-spoon game ; you race along carrying all your hopes on such uncertain tenure, and if you drop your china egg you must just pick it up and start off again.

Only I sometimes wonder if my egg wasn't a real one and can't be picked up:

Peter ! that's cowardly:

Think about the dance ; it's on Friday, only two wee days. I never was so thrilled and excited about anything. Two days ! and I'll be doing lancers and waltzes and—oh ! Bill, get up on your hind legs, darling, and let's have a waltz. I do hope I won't be a fearful heavy-weight. my teacher says I am most satisfactory, and Glen said I was all right too. We had a practice up and down the veranda last night.

He won't admit he's going on Friday, but I know he is—at least, I'll have an awful shock if he doesn't. I wonder if I'll be a wallflower ; of course I don't know many, but Dolly says she'll look after me. It will be disappointing if I don't have a good time.

That's the worst of anticipating so much, you can't enjoy a thing twice. You've used up all its thrill before you get it ; but it doesn't matter, after all, whether you get the pleasure before or at the time, does it, so long as you do get it ? Then, according to your way of looking at it, Peter, you've enjoyed Markhams' dance immensely, thank you.

And, Di, you should see my frock. I must describe it to you carefully ; I know you won't be bored ; what girl could be bored by a frock ? Then—it's charmeuse satin, clinging, glisteny stuff, made quite plain. I'm to wear a wide white band across my hair with a kinky cheeky rosette over one ear, and carry a wee bunch of jasmine. Dolly wanted me to have a proper coming-out bouquet, but I wouldn't, so the jasmine is a compromise. The feel of the long kid gloves crinkling up your arms is just heaven, and I've darling white satin shoes. Dolly says they'll only last twice, and I'd best get kid ones then, the satin work out so terrifically expensive. Only two more days, Di !

Ralph came up last night with Glen too ; he and Dolly seem tremendous pals, though she teases the life out of him for being a curate. But he just smiles blandly and goes one better. We four had quite a jolly little party on our own.

Jack scarcely ever puts in an appearance ; he is either shut up in his room, studying, or out with one of the Dots.

I rather like Dot Parks.

CHAPTER XII

Fate's Latest Joke

Dr, I've so much to tell you I simply don't know where to start, so, for once, just to surprise you, I'll start at the beginning and work through.

It began with dressing for the dance. My frock looked even nicer than I had hoped, and Trixie was as proud of me as if I'd been a picture she had painted—I wasn't painted, of course.

She had given me for a coming-out present the exquisitest necklace and earrings of aquamarines, lying on my throat they did look like drops of sea-water trying to trickle down from their gold bonds; and the way the stones twinkled from my ears at every movement of my head——

Dolly looked me up and down, then said: "Peter, I'm proud to take you out." And that was the nicest of all.

Ralph didn't come to the dance—lots of people think a clergyman shouldn't, so he's had to give it up—but he came round to see me dressed and told me I looked great. I think in his own mind, though, he thought Dolly looked nicer. She had a pinkety muslin on, split at each side, and tied up with great care and neatness by dozens of vivid cerise bows, very small and prim and proper, and a cerise bandage round her head.

Ralph wanted to know if we were taking precautions against headache.

My heart went like an electric car all the way there, but once we got inside the marquee it was all too beautiful to have time to think about myself. The whole room was done in scarlet, and Dolly with a sigh of dismay told

me I was a lucky beggar to be in white. "You look like—like——" She hesitated for a comparison.

"A dewdrop in Sheol," Jack drawled. "Are you going to dance with me, Peter?"

"If you want me to," I said. "Jack, do you know what it all reminds me of, these dark-coated men and the pink-and-white girls?—a whole host of willie-wagtails hopping round a hawthorn bush."

"You've a diseased imagination," Jack told me. "How's your programme?"

He and Dolly were such bricks to me, they kept introducing people to me.

"Dolly," I said once, "I wish you'd ask them first if they want to meet me; I hate to feel perhaps they're being pushed on to me whether they want to or not. Mr. Morris says——"

"Oh, Glen, as usual!" Dolly said; "how many have you got with him?"

"Only three," I answered.

"Anyway," said Dolly, "you're not the sort of girl any man minds meeting. When will you get some conceit? I say, you're not full yet, are you, Peter? Keep a dance; I haven't introduced you to the pick of the bunch. I call him Hercules. I wish the old idiot would hurry up. Surely he's coming."

"No, you can't have a dance; I'm awfully sorry—booked right up."

Dolly turned away to chat with the new-comer, and then for the second time I saw Rex.

I never moved a muscle this time. I felt fatalistic. The meeting had to come sooner or later, why not sooner? So I stood and looked at him. His great shoulders marked him out from the other men; he was standing still, too, his gaze roving round the room as if he were looking for somebody. His gaze came our way, nearer, nearer, nearer—I swallowed hard—nearer—then our eyes met!

And then I grew perfectly calm. I stared on unblinkingly.

I saw him take one slow deep breath, and then he looked like a stone image. Men pushed and bumped against him in the moving press, he heeded them no more than flies. He just stared back.

I don't know how long we stood like that. I suppose it was only a few seconds—it seemed lives. Then he stepped forward. He pushed his way through the press like a sleep-walker, for his eyes never left mine. He bumped against a girl once; he didn't stop to apologise or even seem to notice her, though the look she gave him was naked murder. He came straight on.

Then, when he was only a few feet from me I took my eyes away; I let them travel slowly down to his feet, and then back again to the top of his head, without a glimmer of recognition, and then, in a lazy, uninterested way, turned my back.

At that second I heard Dolly give a little squeal of delight—"Rex, you beast! where have you been all this time? What do you mean by turning up so late? I've been fighting all the evening to save you two dances from these ravening wolves, and I'm not sure now I'll give them to you. They're six and fifteen—put them down. How did you enjoy Sydney? Oh, and I want to introduce you to my cousin. Peter, this is Mr. Ware, Miss Delaney."

I had to turn round.

Dolly's voice rattled on—"I made her save you one, so I know she's got it; which is it, Peter?"

I was still folded round in that tremendous calm—I suppose I was too excited for excitement—and I smiled: There was no way out of the trap for either of us.

"The fourteenth, Dolly," I said clearly. If I had only guessed who Dolly's Hercules was! For a moment I suffered agonies; if his voice should break or he should—anything! But he was as quiet as I.

"Thank you," he said, writing it on his card. And then the first waltz started.

I enjoyed myself—does that sound funny?—but I

did, I enjoyed myself madly, wildly, with the recklessness of relief. At last it was over, the dreaded meeting, and we had kept our wits, and no one knew! And the music was maddening, and the floor like orange-peel, and there was the *chink* of glasses, and laughter, and lace, and tumbling hair; and men said silly things about my eyes and feet.

How could I help being happy? But all the time the little number fourteen was humming at the back of my brain, and all the time I was planning how to get out of it without attracting attention and letting Dolly notice. He didn't seem to dance much, he stood in the doorway a lot of the time with others, and I could feel his eyes follow me round the room.

I thought at the end of the thirteenth I would tell my partner I had torn my dress, and go to the dressing-room straight instead of back to the marquee. It seemed so stupid to have to go and sit out a whole dance by myself, but dance it with him I would *not*!

But after all I had luck. The thirteenth was with Glen, and we went for a walk in the garden. When the music started, Glen took out his programme and looked at it, then he looked at the bushes round and said regretfully: "I suppose you've got a partner for this?"

I hesitated a minute. "No, I haven't," I said. It wasn't really a lie, because I hadn't got a proper partner—no one of use to me, anyway, because I didn't intend to dance with him.

"What a bit of luck!" Glen said. "Shall we sit here, then? You don't want to gambol it, do you?"

"No," I replied; so we sat.

It was most enjoyable. We went in late to the next dance too, and when we arrived Rex was dancing it with Dolly. So that was safe for the evening.

Glen was very nice all night; his eyes smiled across the room as soon as we came in, and he came to us at once and booked dances before he asked anyone else. But tangles will never cease; every day things of the past I

thought I had loosened seem to knot round me more tightly. What do you think is Fate's latest joke, Di? Rex is Glen's partner. Their firm is Morris, Ware, and Harris. He has a tremendous admiration for him, too, and Glen doesn't seem to admire many people.

There's only one thing more. When we got home Dolly said to me:

"Well, what do you think of Hercules?" She didn't wait for a reply. "Isn't he magnificent? All the girls rave over him, but he's the nicest old boy I know, in spite of it. We're very old pals. He's been away in Sydney several months on business or you'd have met him before. He's always up here."

"Oh!" I said blankly.

"But what on earth did you slip him up for?"

I considered a moment. "Mr. Morris and I were out in the garden," I replied, "and when we came back the music had nearly finished." This was the truth, if not the whole of it.

"Little silly!" said her yawning ladyship. "You don't know what you missed."

Don't I, though!

CHAPTER XIII

Dolly is Puzzled

THERE'S a lot in that motto, "All things come to him who waits." At least, I mean things you thought would be downright unfaceable have a way of adjusting themselves; they turn out quite naturally after all. I shall give up worrying about things in future. Look how I had dreaded meeting Rex again, and yet it seemed natural and easy enough when I did.

And he came to tea last Saturday, too. He was out to tennis in the afternoon with Glen and several others. When Dolly told me he was coming, a sort of disgusted fury boiled up in my throat first. Was he going to persecute me? Surely he might have the common decency to stay away from places where I was; he must know the very sight of each other was horrible.

But then my sense of fair play surged on top. After all, I couldn't expect him to cut himself loose from all his old friends simply because I happened to have learnt to know them too. Besides, to avoid me obviously, would that not be the very way to cause comment? No, there was nothing for it but to make up my mind to meet him everywhere and show him the civility I would a chance stranger.

And, to be honest, I must admit he made it no harder for me than he could help. He did not come near me or speak to me except when he had to. But he kept staring at me; I could feel it wherever I went; his gaze burnt itself into my consciousness. Once, when I looked up and met his glance, I frowned and turned to talk to Glen, and I saw him flush red. He flushed once again when I

was chosen to play tennis with him; I said I was tired and wasn't going to play any more. I should not have done that—it was unnecessary, since I would have scarcely had to speak to him; and stupid too, for it woke up Dolly.

I wonder what she can see in him to like so much? My dear, how funny that looks, but I meant, on what could she found a reasoned, cordial affection? Of course I loved him, but that was a girl's first romantic passion that the first lover come can wake. He cannot merit honest, sincere esteem that weighs and judges, and yet Dolly is fond of him, and she is no fool.

But I wish she wouldn't insist on me sharing her admiration. She said to me on Saturday night: "Peter, my opinion of your taste has reached a minimum quantity."

"Oh!" I said.

Dolly reached for another chocolate and closed her eyes in dreamy appreciation.

"Strawberry," she said, "don't you love them with jam in the middle? You have an irritating habit, Peter, of always using an exclamation instead of an interrogation mark in conversation. It's so discouraging."

"Is that why you deprecate my taste? Find me a strawberry one, Dolly; it's time we both went to sleep."

"That's why we don't do it—sensible things are always so unpleasant. No, it's because you don't appreciate Rex Ware."

I hunted earnestly in the chocolate box. "Peccavi!" I said.

"Why wouldn't you play tennis with him, or talk to him after tea?"

"For the simple reason—this is a strawberry, too—there were other people I knew better, and liked to talk to more. Why do you poke your Hercules at me?"

"I'm disappointed," Dolly confessed; "I had somehow made up my mind you two would get on together. I feel as if an $a=b$ had suddenly turned to $a+b=0$, which is absurd. Anything absurd annoys me, and algebra

can't make mistakes. I must have worked it out wrong. You ought to like each other—why don't you ? ”

Dolly is nothing if not persistent. I yawned.

“ Go to bed,” I replied.

Dolly folded her gown firmly round her. “ Why wouldn't you be civil to him ? ”

“ Ask me something easier,” I said lightly. And indeed there were few questions Dolly could ask that wouldn't have been easier to answer.

“ I can understand unreasoning antagonism when it's mutual,” Dolly mused, her chin sunk in her knees, “ but Rex takes an interest in you.”

“ How kind of him ! ” I said.

“ Don't sneer, Peter, it's cheap. Rex does not indulge in curiosity, but he certainly—well, encouraged me to talk about you the other night. He thinks you beautiful.”

“ I suppose you invited him to say so ? ”

“ Perhaps I did ”—Dolly is honest, anyway—“ but he meant it. It's exasperating of you, Peter, to go brushing your hair like that silly Charlotte person who always kept on cutting bread and butter whatever happened. There's lots of girls in Adelaide who'd think themselves lucky if he'd bother to ask a question or two about them. Let me tell you, Rex is one of Adelaide's eligibles.”

“ I hate that word, Dolly,” I snapped ; “ it's vulgar ! ”

“ Common sense is always vulgar. And he's a darling, too. Let's hope your perceptual level of intelligence will improve.” (Dolly is studying psychology at present, and the family have to put up with language like this.) She yawned abruptly, “ Good-night,” and went.

I sat a long while thinking. I rather enjoyed that spar with Dolly. I like to dance on the edge of a precipice, there's a certain exhilaration in danger. If only the danger wasn't—just the sort it is. I must be polite to him, though. Oh, how can I act the hypocrite ? Must I all my life smile and lie and cheat ? I suppose it's part of my punishment.

Foxy Bill is whimpering outside my window. A soft little wind is trying to go to sleep in the jasmine, and whimpering, too, because it can't. Oh! we're all very tired and sick of it all, so we'd better go bye-bye like sensible children instead of crying and getting cross,

Good-night, Billy-boy.

CHAPTER XIV

Dolly Gives it Up

I DON'T know why I'm talking to you to-day, Di, for I've nothing particular to say. Nothing of note has happened unless you'd count a letter from father. It's the first time he has condescended to remember my existence since I left, although I've written to him several times. There wasn't particularly much in it, either. To be precise, it said, "Glad you're having a good time; if you want more money, say so.—J. DELANEY." Short and, for father, sweet.

But I don't know—I've got a talkative mood on like I used to get ages ago, and there's no one to talk to. Dolly is at the 'Varsity at one of her old lectures, and Trixie is gardening. This is a sacred occupation with her, and she allows no outside distraction. I watched her for a while. I'm sitting in the veranda; she was kneeling in the carnation bed, and she just looked the biggest of them herself. She always wears a pink zephyr dress when she's gardening, and a huge hat lined with pink, but on her hands are a most business-like pair of gloves, and a pair of clip-cutter things slung at her waist. Trixie in her gardening rig spells W-O-R-K—all capitals. I wish I were as adorable as she.

Bill is playing with the kitten. We call it Persian because when it first came we thought it was one; however, it turned out a common tabby. Bill is enjoying himself hugely; he chases it and pretends to chew it up, and the kitten squeals in an affected falsetto and tenderly pats his nose with her paw.

In the paddock over the road there's a man ploughing:

I seem to be the only idler. His blue shirt makes such a pretty spot of colour against the dun ground and the brown and grey of the horses. They are such beautiful big-limbed creatures; I can see their muscles strain when they get up our end.

I feel like a tin of condensed laziness. It reminds me of a funny old poem I read ages ago. I only remember the first lines, they go something like this. It's supposed to be the soliloquy of an old tramp; he sits on a fence and draws:

"I wish I was like the rocks,
Doin' nothin' all the day:
Wouldn't eat, wouldn't sleep,
Wouldn't even *breathe*."

That last appeals to me—"wouldn't even breathe"; it expresses the last absolute glorious limit of peacefulness. I nearly go to sleep just thinking about it.

It's quite a long while since we had a yarn, but I'm always flying round so hard I scarcely seem to get a minute in which to think. It's either tennis parties, or shopping, or dances, or the theatre, or picnics, or half a dozen other ways of wasting time. Glen calls me "the butterfly" now. I've been to ever so many dances since I last wrote, and each one is nicer than the one before.

I love the music and the motion of it, and the delightful feel of skill when you just manage to avoid a bump from someone else as you whirl through the press, and your feet tingle; and the swish of the frocks, and the nice sniffy whiff of the powder on the girls' shoulders; and to watch them look sideways with their eyes, and the men bending right up close.

I wonder what's the matter with mine; ever so many men have told me I've got wicked eyes. They didn't mean to be rude, Di, it's intended as a compliment. I got angry with the first man, and he was so surprised. One partner asked me if I knew how to spell my mouth. He said it was t-e-m-p-t-a-t-i-o-n.

It's such fun being talked to like girls in books. I could enjoy all of it even if I could only sit still and look on, but to be actually in and a part of it—words are no use.

Nothing can damp my joy, not even Rex. He goes about a good deal, and we are obliged to meet often; sometimes we have to even talk to each other, and I feel hot and cold all over, but social veneer is a wonderful thing when you've learnt it; no one would know we were anything but the most courteous of acquaintances. But lying makes me sick.

He often comes up to our place, too. Dolly, you see, is very fond of him, and so is the Doctor. It is fairly easy to avoid him in my own place, being hostess; if we get near each other accidentally, I can always get up and dash away to amuse someone else without it being noticed—except by Dolly. Her eyes are like cameras, they record everything, and when she's developed up her negatives in the room of dark and deep meditation she comes and holds forth to me. And I daren't say more than just that he doesn't amuse me.

You should see the wattle-tree, it has no flowers on at this time of the year, but it waves its smudgy, silvered-green foliage to and fro in the air like a lady toying with a fan. You'd laugh at its languid air of boredom. The very shadows look as if they couldn't be bothered to move. Even the flies buzz half-heartedly.

I'm going to sleep—sleep—sleep—

Gracious, no! I'm not. I was going to tell you about the theatre last night. Ralph wanted to take Dolly, and Dolly didn't want to go alone with him—people do chatter so if they see you sitting in state by yourself, two-not-under-an-umbrella style—so he diplomatically suggested to Glen that he might take me, and the four of us went, the idea not being displeasing to His Serenity.

It was such fun going! We saw lots of people we knew, of course. The girl who tried to take Glen away

from me at the Dandies was there, and how she did telescope me !

The play was called *The Hypocrites*. It was beautifully told, and it gave me such a queer feeling of comfort, and yet it hurt me worse than anything ever has since. I didn't realise girls like us were despised so much. Nobody seemed to think the girl was fit for anything else but to marry the man who had betrayed her, and she—she asked him to marry her. Why, I would die first ; he would be the one man in the world I would never marry ! I could never forgive him. Besides, neither of you could ever forget, and to have that always between you like a mocking ghost from the past——

But she was very beautiful, that girl, and you couldn't help feeling glad he did marry her, if that would make her happy. Besides, she was going to have a baby——perhaps that makes you feel different.

The funniest thing in the play was, you couldn't help feeling sorry for the man too ; he seemed to really love her, and yet, if he did, how could he bear to desert her so cruelly ? His people wanted him to marry another girl, and he nearly did too.

Men are **incomprehensible**.

I wonder if Rex has seen the play ? Wouldn't it have been queer if he had been there the same night as we were ; I didn't see him, but he might have been.

I shan't think about it any more. I'm going to get flat on that lawn and let the sunshine soak through and through till it soaks my whole mind and body with its liquid gold and drives out all the black thoughts and cobwebby remembrances that try to get a corner there. And if I get freckles and freckles I don't care.

Rex's eyes fidget me sometimes. He doesn't speak to me, but he is always looking at me. It doesn't matter where he is in the room, sooner or later I feel his eyes on me. That's the annoying part ; I'm always conscious of them, but yet his face is always like a mask, beautiful and expressionless, but his eyes somehow look as if he had

a pain at the back of them. I wonder if he is sometimes sorry ?

Dolly notices, too. " Peter," she said, " I give it up. You and Rex are a problem past me ; he gazes after you with a look in his eyes like a smacked baby, and yet he doesn't even ask you to dance. You like difficult game, Peter ; two of the unattainables already at your heels, the woman-hater and the woman-conqueror."

" Dolly, don't ! " I pleaded.

In a second Dolly was all seriousness. " My darling kid, I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Can't you tell me what it is, Peter ? "

I do wish I could;

CHAPTER XV

Logic

LAST Tuesday Glen motored up to see me; his people have two beautiful cars—Ralph came too, so we all went out on the lawn and talked. Ralph and Dolly stayed with us, for a wonder—generally they go away by themselves.

I'm almost sure Ralph's falling in love with Dolly. I wish he would, he's such a nice fellow. You wouldn't think he was a bit religious.

Jack, as usual, was out with one of the Dots. I wouldn't like to be one of them, I think it's horribly undignified to fight for a man.

Glen was rather silent for him. He is beginning to be queer at times now. Sometimes I think he is getting a little tired of me. And when he has one of his prickly moods on it always affects me and makes me silent too. So we turned our attention to Ralph and Dolly.

"You can make her let you come?" Ralph was saying.

"No, I can't," Dolly replied. "Trixie objects to Sunday picnics. It's a remnant of respectability."

"But it's my only free day," Ralph urged, "and my last one. Just a wee one, Dolly, only a cabload of us. What more harm is there in a day spent in God's fresh air than in sitting home reading a rubbishy novel? Besides, think what an odour of sanctity my cloth lends to it."

"That's the point; Trixie'll be more scandalised than ever."

"Tackle her with your convincing logic," Ralph advised.

"Now," said Dolly, "you are merely absurd. Logic's no use except in classrooms. Do you suppose a woman——"

"In the case?"

"Of course"—Dolly's nose sought the stars—"if you're going to be ridiculous——"

"I'm not; I've been. Do go on." Ralph wriggled his back more comfortably into the curve of the chair and gazed at Dolly with frank enjoyment. She was pleasant to look at, I had to admit it myself; Glen seemed to think so, too.

"You see it's this way." Dolly's face began to light up, as it always did when she got one of her philosophising moods on. "The eternal conflict between practice and theory. Logic is like a beautiful gimlet floating in the air; then it wants to get its way into someone's head, and it bores and bores——"

"Lord, how it does bore!" Glen agreed with a yawn.

"—Until it blunts its point and dies of a broken heart."

"Really, Dolly," Glen expostulated, "your metaphors——"

"Shut up!" Dolly ordered; "I'm talking. You see, logic only shows its cleverness at deductions; the major premise is what mankind squabbles over, and that logic always has to take for granted. To explain myself——"

"Which would be utterly to destroy your charm, Dolly."

"Oh! muzzle him, Peter," Dolly snapped. "I'm talking to Ralph."

Ralph shut one eye and gazed at a cloud of smoke. "Please go on," he murmured.

"I mean to. Now, the two things logic fairly tears its hair over are *Petitio principii* and *Circulus*——"

"*Amo amas*, I love a lass," Glen trilled. "Come off your perch, Dolly. *Haciendas*, señor. *Parlez-vous français?*"

"*Circulus in probando*. And these two are the whole stock-in-trade of the ordinary arguer."

"It sounds deadly ammunition," Glen ventured.

"The first fallacy is dearly beloved of lawyers."

"Never heard of it. Cross my heart," Glen declared.

"It's begging the question, assuming the answer you are trying to find. As thusly:—Scene, a court-room, fierce judge, fiercer counsel, witness trembling for his reputation.

"Counsel (savagely): 'Have you given up drink?'

"Witness (indignantly): 'I never——'

"Counsel: 'Have you or have you not?'

"Witness: 'I said before——'

"Counsel: 'Pardon me, sir, you did not.'

"Judge: 'You must answer counsel's question.'

"Witness: 'Why, I—I——'

"Counsel: 'Come, sir, a plain answer to a plain question—have you given up drink?'

"Witness (desperately): 'But I tell you——'

"Counsel: 'Yes or no?'

"Judge: 'You are wasting the court's time, sir.'

"Counsel (thundering): 'Yes or no?'

"Witness (who has been a blue-ribbonite from his youth up): 'No—that is, yes.'

"Whisper round the court-room: 'Hypocrite! Then he did drink in secret. Scandalous!'

"Counsel glares round triumphantly, and witness sees his reputation gone for ever."

"Splendid, Dolly! what a cross-examiner was wasted in you!" Glen drawled. "How about joining our firm?"

"I'm rather particular," Dolly replied.

"Such a commonplace retort," he said; "it is unworthy of you."

"I always," Dolly replied, "endeavour to bring my repartee down to the level of my listeners."

"But the circle arrangement?" Ralph the peacemaker interposed.

"I'll give you an example of that," Glen volunteered: "it's positively unanswerable."

"I love Dolly."

"Why do I love Dolly?"

"Because Dolly loves me."

"Why does Dolly love me?"

"Because I love Dolly."

"Of all shameless cheek, blatant untruth, and incomprehensible——"

"It's a wonder, Dolly," Glen said reproachfully, "that that mouth of yours doesn't widen to a cavern considering the size of things that come out of it."

"Bulk is the only thing that seems to impress undeveloped minds," Dolly sniffed.

"Too deep." Glen wiped his brow. "Let's clean up the slate and start again. Also it's a heavenly night for a spin—my motor's outside—who'll come? You, Dolly, or Miss Delaney?"

"Not I!" Dolly said promptly. "I've had enough quarrelling for to-night."

"Miss Delaney?" A hot little gulp caught in my throat; to ask me second-hand!

"No—thank you," I answered guiltily.

"Why?" He looked at me through half-shut lids. "You're riled with me—what about? Oh!——" A look of comprehension began to dawn in his eyes.

"Rubbish!" I said, furious with myself for my little-mindedness, and furious with him for divining it. "I'm only tired. I'll come."

He tucked me nicely in without a word, and off we glid. I think "glid" is the only word for a motor on an asphalt road. I leant back and looked up at the stars, and the wind blew little kiss-curles round my eyes; it was so hot I hadn't bothered to put a hat on. Every now and then

I felt him watching me. I felt—yes, I will tell you, Di—I felt as if he wanted to kiss me. I wonder if he did ?

I felt awfully snappy, ready to bite his head off the first word he said, but he didn't say it ; and from feeling cross because I thought he would talk I got to feeling cross because he wouldn't. I don't know whether Dolly's logic could have explained it. At last I said : " Have you been well brought up ? "

" I don't know," he said, a little surprisedly. " Why ? "

" Because you never speak unless you're spoken to."

" Oh ! " he said, and again bent over the steering wheel.

Trees and houses and rose-bushes slid by like moon-flecked shadows, and the road wound itself up behind us like a reel of cotton ; we were away up round Paradise by this time. I love motoring, just the sheer motion of it ; the breeze is like champagne, and the speed like brandy. My ill-humour blew away, and I got rather a surprise when in the middle of my dreaming he began awkwardly, " I say."

I gazed inquiringly at him, but he carefully looked anywhere but at me.

" You—you don't suppose I care about Dolly really, do you ? I—everyone talks tripe like that sort—well, a fellow couldn't say things like that if he cared, do you think ? "

" How should I know ? " I said indifferently. I saw his chin stick out, so I added : " I didn't suppose I—just—you—oh ! really," as he turned another corner I was glad of a chance to change the subject, " don't you think we'd better go home ? "

" Think Dolly and Ralph will be missing us ? " he laughed. " Looks as if those two are going to fix things up, don't you think ? "

" I'm sure I don't know," I said. " Dolly's changeable, but she does seem to like him a bit. But a clergyman——"

"Hardly Dolly's style," he agreed. "I've got no time for them myself, but Ralph's rather a sport for a flat-hat. And whatever Dolly means to do I reckon he's caught. Poor brute!" he added.

"Why poor brute?" I was a bit nettled. Sometimes I get a bit sick of the way Glen jibes at marriage, because I know—— Perhaps I don't.

Glen didn't answer my question, he pursued his own train of thought. "You know, I can't understand a fellow being as daft over a girl as Ralph seems; I could never lose my head like that."

"That's a sign of weakness, not strength," I said.

"But women don't like you," he argued, "if you let them see they can walk all over you. A pal of mine told me the way to make a woman like you is to pretend to be indifferent to her."

I sniffed. He stole a glance at my profile.

"What do you think of it?"

"It's like all maxims," I said, "more of a lie because of the truth in it. At the beginning, if a man is truly indifferent to a woman, it may pique her to interest; but if, after he has won her liking, he attempts to cement it that way, one of two things will happen. If he acts badly she will see through his pretence and feel a mild contempt for him plus amusement; if he does it well enough to deceive her, and she's at all a self-respecting girl, her pride will make her choke down her liking for him instead of encouraging it."

"Hum!" Glen commented.

"You," I said disdainfully, "are a cold-blooded fish."

He gave a queer little smile. "So you think me cold-blooded?"

"Either you are or pretend to be," I retorted; "sometimes I think one, sometimes the other. One thing certain, I'll be jolly sorry for your wife."

"I'll make a jolly good husband," he said, "if I ever make one at all, which is improbable."

"Have you got such an objection to marriage?" I asked curiously.

"No, only to *my* marriage."

The motor chug-chugged a few hundred yards before either of us spoke again, then he inquired: "Why would you be sorry for my wife?"

"It's hard to explain," I said thoughtfully. "You're so—so——"

"I'm not sensitive."

"Well, so self-centred and selfish. I don't mean horridly selfish, you know; just that you're absorbed in your work and your interests, and a woman would be to you merely one of the latter. You'd be awfully nice to her, I know, whenever you remembered her existence, but half the time you wouldn't, and when you suddenly woke up to the fact you had a wife it'd give you an awful shock."

He laughed, a real merry laugh that startled a pair of lovers under a pepper tree.

"You're right," he agreed, "it would be a shock."

Somehow his acquiescence grated on me, and I leant back on the cushiony seat. "You're too utterly stupid for anything to-night," I said petulantly. "I don't like you a bit."

"That's bad luck," he said, "since my chief aim in life is to please you." The words were spoken lightly, almost mockingly, but at the same time he gave me a funny glance from his eyes sideways that somehow robbed them of any offence, indeed they seemed to say—— Di, I do wish I knew how much he liked me. He must a little bit, but I wish he wouldn't be always saying such nasty, sneery, cynical things.

I still felt a bit vindictive, though, so I replied: "I read yesterday that half-shut eyes like yours denote shrewdness but lack of sincerity."

"I admit the second," he said.

"Which proves," I retorted, "you lack the first."

"I am very young," he said humbly; but the aforementioned eyes danced:

I wish my eyes had gold spots in them.

Life is very perplexing. But I do hope Trixie lets us go for that picnic. It would be so nice. And Ralph's got to go away for a few weeks, too. We must make Jack tackle her.

I wonder which Dot he'll take?

CHAPTER XVI

Two Eyes of Grey

I **DID** have fun yesterday. My hen deserted her ducklings as soon as they came out, so I kept them in a basket for a couple of days, wrapped up in flannel. But this morning was so fine I put them out in the sun in the back-yard, and for greater safety from cats and so forth I fetched Maria down from the fowl-yard and told her to look after them. You never saw such a ridiculous performance in your life. Those young ducks appreciated Maria as much as a prophecy. They had a dish of water there, and nothing else mattered in their opinion. They flopped in and out, and sprawled and kicked in the sun, and dug their little beaks in the sand, like a pack of babies on the beach. I wanted to take the whole lot up in my arms and hug them, but they flee for bare life if I approach.

Maria didn't appreciate them, either. In the first place, she objected to being hauled so unceremoniously out of the fowl-yard (I told Wilkins she didn't like being carried by her legs); ruffled dignity showed in every feather, and when her injured feelings calmed down enough to allow her to cluck at them in a better-make-the-most-of-a-bad-job manner, the way those ducklings turned the deaf ear and whisked the careless tail simply infuriated her again. She pranced up and down in an undecided manner, scolding vigorously, and finally came to rest in an attitude of washing her hands of the whole business and uttering loud squawks of protest (intended for me). Oh! but those ducklings with their saucy beads of eyes—the darling little demons! Why must they grow old and fat and ugly?

If I had made the world there should be nothing ugly in it, everything should start at beautiful, and I'd make variety by the comparatives being more beautiful and exquisite. I don't like seeing ugly things, I feel so sorry for them; it makes me unhappy, especially ugly women.

Glen came up to-night, and Rex did too. I can't ask Dolly not to have her friends up in her own house, but I do wish he would not come so often. He upset me, too, to-night. There were not many of us. Dolly had asked Dot Parks to tea, and Jack was devoting himself to her, so I suppose she was happy. It's really rather funny they should both be named Dot, but, as Glen pointed out, it may save trouble if he ever puts the wrong letter in the envelope.

We didn't expect Glen and Rex, you know, they just turned up together. I can't get over the queerness of their being partners; and they seem tremendously fond of each other—for Rex seems to love Glen as much as Glen admires Rex. It's rather nice to see two men look at each other like they do.

We played cards at first, and we four made a table of bridge while Jack and Dot sat on the piano-stool and strummed bits of opera. After a while they slipped outside. We all just smiled.

Then Dolly said she was simply sick of losing, and wanted to sing. Glen added up the totals and found we were four hundred and fifty-nine ahead. He waved the fact over Dolly's head like a red rag, but she only sniffed.

"'Lucky at cards, unlucky at love,'" she prophesied. "You'll see! Rex, I want music badly, it's bubbling up inside me. Let's come and sing together." So, of course, he had to go.

Glen and I sat on the sofa, and talked under cover of the music. Most of the time he expatiated on Rex and what a tremendous fine fellow he was.

"I'm worried about him lately, though," he said, "Do you think he looks ill?"

"No," I replied.

"Ugh! I do; there's something up, anyway. Perhaps it's a girl—seems to have the same effect. By Jove!" he seemed intensely pleased with himself, "I believe I've hit it; it is a girl."

I shivered. Dolly was playing a nocturne of Chopin's, creepy and wailly, and Rex was gazing at Glen and me. Outside we could hear a low-running murmur from Jack and Dot, and everything seemed chill and horrible.

"Funny how a girl knocks a fellow off his balance, isn't it?" Glen pursued meditatively. "But I don't know, girls don't upset Rex like that as a rule, he knows 'em too well. There's something on his mind. I wish I knew what it is. He's really been like this for months, ever since that trip to the West—yes, I noticed it first when he came back."

I locked my fingers and gazed at them intently "Noticed what?" I said.

"His—well, his general out-of-sortsness. You see, we've been pals ever since we were at college, and I hate to see him moping. He isn't a bit his gay old self, he used to be the careless, happy-go-lucky sort nothing worries, and now you can't get a smile out of him. I say, is the room too hot for you?" he looked startled.

"It's nothing," I said unsteadily. "Let's stand outside the door and get some fresh air."

One door opens into the veranda, so we stood there and listened to Dolly. She made a pretty picture in the rose-shaded lights against the piano, and Rex's huge yellow head close to hers. I think I laughed.

Then Dolly began to sing; softly, softly sweet the melody crept to us, it seemed almost to caress its way into our ears. She was singing the song she calls mine. The words came very distinctly:

"Two eyes of grey that used to be so bright,
Why is the shadow veiling all your light?
Why do the tears usurp the place
Of just the sweetest light I ever saw
In anybody's face?"

The pine-trees down the garden seemed to send back an eerie echo. It was a very dark night.

"Glen!" called Jack.

He excused himself and went.

Then I felt Rex beside me; I had not seen him move in the gloom. For a second we looked at each other.

"Peter," he said in a queer, unsteady voice, "will the sadness never go out of your eyes?"

Then Glen came back. At the same minute Dolly appeared in the doorway.

"Rex," she said coaxingly, "do come and sing that little gipsy song. You haven't sung it for months and months; I want Peter to hear it. You know which I mean, the 'You are my darling' one."

But he wouldn't.

CHAPTER XVII

An Offer of Marriage

DI, I'm in a rage, a cold, deadly, raging rage, and in between my spasms of wrath I feel boiling with shame. How dare he humiliate me like that? Oh, Di, I wish I'd never been born. Oh, I want to tear you to pieces, little book, and wreck the room, and go out and kill this hateful, sneering, posing-virtuous world like a cornered rat until it kills me. It's no use me trying to write in such a breathless fury, I'll go and hang my head out of my window in the jasmine creeper and see if it can soothe me to-night—it generally does. But how I hate him!

There, I feel better now. I'll sit still and take deep breaths till my heart stops thumping at such a rate. It is such a lovely night outside, you'd hardly think it canopied such a Hades. I'm in Hades; there can be nothing worse than what I suffer. Oh, Di! If I could go to sleep for ever and forget—forget——

I feel as if I were walking in the bottomless pit, and there is a rope round the neck of my spirit, and my feet are clamped together in a chilling mist of hatred that is rising slowly round me till it clasps my waist, and reaches my nostrils, and chokes me with its evil breath.

God save me from myself. But to think the whole world despises Peter Piper, or would if they knew—it's the same thing—they'll know some day, nothing can be hidden for ever. I almost wish they knew, and that the deceit and suspense were over. My punishment did not stop when I left the West, though I thought it had, and gave thanks on my knees. Blind fool I was! Is it nothing to carry the burden of a living lie round with you,

slung on your neck like the Mariner's albatross? The knife of remorse and shame stabs twice as fiercely when I take the love and caresses of those around me as one ignorant and innocent, when I sun myself in the homage of those who, if they knew, would treat me as one who has no further claim to deference.

Sometimes, when I am the merriest of a group, I clench my hands until the nails bite into my palms, in sudden misery of remembrance. What right have I there, jesting among honest girls? Sometimes, I am half mad; I have lain on the floor and beat my forehead on the ground, begging God to kill me or let me forget. God! God! I've no one else to turn to, can't You comfort me a little? You know now how bitter my repentance is, You know how I have often cried my eyes blind with tears in the night when others sleep, You know it was not my fault. Oh, Peter, you fool, not even God can undo what has been done.

Oh, Di, look! a whole page of your nice book all blotted and smudged by this cry-baby.

There, dry your eyes with a nice scenty pocket-wipe, and powder your nose, and try to tell her connectedly all that happened. It's funny how the little vanities of life are so all-important. The consciousness of a fresh face and well-dressed hair enables a woman to face the world better than gallons of conscious rectitude. If I could just tell Trixie—but she would be shocked! I know, she is so sweet and pretty and good she could never understand it. I can't myself now; my feelings are dead, and I only despise him. That's what rankles most. If I loved him still, perhaps I'd forgive myself, but all that remains is a vague wonder and disgust. You can't tell anyone, Peter, you must bear it alone, but I wish the hurt round my heart would stop for a little while. How I hate Rex!

How the stars make you realise the littleness of everything; such great far-away wonderful worlds, and yet to us such futile sparks of light. If they seem as grains of sand in the scheme of things, how much more are we

less than the dust? I wonder if the wind that blows out of my window up towards them is just the sigh of the world, the poor tired old world that only wants to go to sleep? I wonder what's the use of it, anyway? But the more you wonder the more tangled you get.

It promised to be such a lovely day, too, and I had been so happy lately. I opened my eyes to the slow clang of the church bells, made sweet by distance, with that nice sort of feeling you have sometimes that there are pleasant things in the air though you're too sleepy to remember quite what they are. Then I woke up quite suddenly and remembered the picnic. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The jasmine flung its fragrance at me like a good-morning kiss. The sun stroked my neck, quite a young sun, fighting his way through the pines that guard my window; and on the ground sat Foxy Bill playing with the Persian.

I sat at the window for awhile, and laughed at their frolic, and let the wind blow all over me till I sneezed, so then I started to dress. I chose a blue linen to wear, and a white hat lined with blue, and when I was dressed I thought I looked rather nice; Dolly said I did too, and of course she always does. Her mouth is the largest I ever saw, and yet it is what makes her whole face fascinating. Isn't it strange how our faults can be our best assets?

I felt quite excited at breakfast. Trixie was a bit shocked at our going, but Jack smoothed her down, he can do anything with her, and the others came round about eleven, and off we set. There was just a cab-load, eight of us—Dolly and Jack, and me and Glen, and Ralph and Rex, Dot Parks for Jack, and Lucy Rees. We were a noisy crew; even Rex being there couldn't damp my spirits, anyway he didn't come near me. He is graver than he used to be. Sometimes when he is joking with Dolly it sounds as if his laughter were forced, but I suppose it's only my imagination.

It was quite a job packing in the luggage; the noise and fun we had tucking it and ourselves in that little space,

Trixie said, was a disgrace for Sunday morning ; and then in the cab, too, it was like an exploring expedition, trying to make room for our feet. When once we got packed if anyone wanted to move a toe it had to be the performance of the "family coach." But we enjoyed even the discomforts. Nobody minds what happens on a picnic. We went to Long Gully, and you know what a pretty drive it is along the Hills Road, with the big gums like a bodyguard all the way, and the big gaps between the slopes, and the rocks and bushes lining them, and the off-wheel about a foot sometimes from the drop. I never saw such a blue sky in all my life.

We chattered and laughed and sang, and the boys told us funny stories and jeered at Jack's driving, but we got there safely. We had the cunningest arbour you ever saw, all grown over with Kennedya and bougainvillea, it looked in the distance like a gigantic violet ; and two tennis courts. We had a set first while the boys made the fire and put on the billy, then we let them have one while we unpacked the eatables and laid the cloth and waited for the billy to boil.

After lunch we washed up. Have you ever tried to wash up sitting on the ground, and out of a glass bowl too (we'd forgotten a wash-tin) ? I'm afraid the cleanness of our platters wasn't above suspicion, but again, who cares at a picnic ? When a fly got in your tea, or a venturesome caterpillar, you weren't allowed to throw it away, you had to fish out the intruder and finish your drink ; and an ant in your sandwich only lends it an added flavour—at a picnic.

But somehow after lunch I didn't enjoy it so much. We played a lot of tennis, but Glen didn't seem to care to talk to me like he usually does. At least, I had a set with him, and he came and sat beside me at afternoon tea, but he seemed to talk an awful lot to Dolly. He told me that he thought she was a downright charming girl. I'm beginning to wonder if he likes Dolly better than me. Of course I don't care if he does, it's none of

my business ; but still, he has been nice to me, and you don't like to feel people like you less than they used to.

He was nice in a way, and said one or two silly things like he has taken to saying lately, pretending he wants to please me. Sometimes I like them, and sometimes he says them in such a mocking, casual sort of way, and there is such a—I can't think of any adjective to fit it—look in his eye that may seem almost an insult, and I get mad. It was some tiny thing that ruffled me first (it's the tiny things that fidget most, isn't it ?) ; I'd said I hated red ties on men, and he has rather a fondness for them (I wish he hadn't, because they don't go with his hair a bit). We were all joking on the subject, and Glen said :

“ Really mind enough to hate them ? ”

“ Yes, I do,” I said ; “ positively, I wouldn't marry a man who wore red ties.”

Glen looked up with that mocking smile of his between half-shut lids, and said so that none could hear but me :

“ At that rate I'll have to give up wearing 'em, won't I ? ”

I felt such a fool, and yet on top of that he got up to play a set with Dolly and scarcely came near me again. And then the—the thing happened.

I was alone away from the rest, just waiting for the billy to boil, and Ralph was collecting a few more sticks. The light was just dimming ; they could still see the tennis balls, but with growing difficulty, and the white figures were darting to and fro on the courts ; the sun was setting like a big saucer behind the bush, and sending blue and yellow spots and shadows across their flannels. The fire streaked up and licked the sides of the billy and made little duskinesses on the scrub around. The silence was almost eerie. We had, of course, built the fire some distance away, so that the heat and smoke would not annoy us, and when a distant snatch of laughter came it somehow made the silence more oppressive than ever.

I stood still. I forgot the tennis. my pretty clothes,

Trixie, and Dolly, and Glen. I was just Peter Piper again, seventeen and good, and it didn't seem a bit queer for a minute to find Rex by my side. His face was set, and his shoulders had a look about them as if he had something unpleasant to go through and meant to get it over quickly.

I shrank away involuntarily; I hadn't meant to be rude, but there was no one else there, and he had surprised me before I had time to pretend. He winced as if I had struck him.

"For God's sake don't look at me like that, Peter," he said passionately. "Do you hate me?"

"Yes," I answered.

He took a deep breath and stood silent. I turned to the fire and mechanically poked things under it.

"Would you please go away?" I said.

He bit his lip. "I never get a chance to speak to you," he said. "I've wanted to tell you for a long while——"

"You can have nothing to say," I said steadily, "that I wish to hear."

"I know I have behaved like a cad," he said in a low tone; "it was a moment's——"

I was on my feet in a second facing him, and I had to push my hand against my heart to stop its beating. "How dare you!" I whispered, for no voice would come; "how dare you speak of it!"

He took off his hat and stood bareheaded. "Peter, will you marry me?" he said:

Something seemed to give me a little stab inside and then left me feeling dead. I think I laughed. How strange men are! If he had asked me that many months ago! I looked at him standing there, like Hercules, the wind ruffling his fair hair, his great shoulders motionless and his eyes fixed on the ground; and all of a sudden I was filled with passionate rage against this beautiful giant who had wrecked my life and caused all my suffering, and who stood there, himself untouched, calmly offering me—— I bent again to the fire:

"You have not answered," he said after a little while:

I looked up, and I think the scorn I had of him blazed in my eyes. "You need an answer?" I said.

The blood crept up his face. "A man can't offer more than that," he stammered; "what other reparation——"

"Reparation!" I cut him short; I had never been so madly raging in all my life. "Reparation!" I said again, and laughed outright. Then I went close to him and stood there stiff and straight, and my eyes felt as if they burned. "What," I said, "can you offer me in exchange for what you stole—a girl's innocence?"

"I've told you," he said, never moving, a great blur against the dark sky.

"And do you think," I said bitterly, "I would marry you? I would die first. Marriage means love and respect. I do not love you, nor do you me. And respect!" I laughed again. "And as for marrying to save my name——"

"For God's sake speak lower," he said, hurriedly glancing round.

"Are you afraid?" I mocked.

"For you, yes."

Somehow the bitter words died away on my tongue. A burst of merriment that floated to us sounded out of place. The incongruity of it struck me suddenly; there were they chattering about tennis and tea, and here were we—— If they only guessed!

"Let us go back," I said abruptly.

We walked slowly back. Ralph was there; he had not come near us; he is very discreet.

Just as we got close to them Rex said to me in a low tone, "You will not?"

"I will not."

Six pairs of mischievous eyes greeted us, but no one spoke until Jack said gravely, "Peter, you have forgotten the billy!" and then there was pandemonium.

Glen hardly spoke to me coming home. I think he was angry with Rex. If he only knew how little cause he has!

Rex did not speak to me again till we got home. I tried to avoid saying good-bye to him, but he came and took my hand and towered over me in his big dominant way, and I felt small and helpless as I used to feel with him. His eyes stared compellingly into mine for a second as he said in a rapid undertone: "You lied when you said I did not love you."

I wrenched my hand away, and my eyes were full of angry tears, but he could not see them. "Spare me that last insult," I said; and he turned and went towards the gate with his shoulders bowed like a beaten cur. Ah! no, that's a lie; he is always like a lion, magnificent, but he has a cur's soul. And he never loved me.

And when she kissed me good-night, Dolly said, "Peter Delaney, don't tell me again you don't like Rex."

How dare he put me in such a false position! How I ought to hate him! I do too. To offer marriage to me as if I were the lowest of the low, to hand it me as a favour, to me whose only crime was that I loved him—was ever a girl so humiliated before? I have no more tears left!

Oh, mother! I want my mother!

CHAPTER XVIII

Mother Trixie

DI, I'm home-sick. Home-sick for a sight of the scrub, and the moon among the wattles at night, and the air that Nugget made whistle past my ears, and my old moth-eaten room with the purple Kennedya poking its spikes through my window.

Yes, and home-sick for father's curses and the black loneliness of it day after day. Peter, you're a sentimental idiot. Why do we always remember the nice parts of things and forget all the drawbacks, I wonder? I've been here three months now, and it seems as if I had always. They are good to me, and I love them all, especially Trixie. She is so pretty, she looks like Dolly's sister instead of her mother; she couldn't be dearer to me if I were her own daughter. I wonder just particularly what claim I have on her. How father seems to hate her!

She gave me a blue silk dressing gown to-day. I've got it on now; I look rather nice in it, Di. She gave me a new muslin frock too, smothered in tiny tucks and lace till there isn't a square of plain on it. I wore it at our party to-night. I remonstrated with her. Father gives me a dress allowance, of course, but she is always making me presents. Every time she gets something special for Dolly she gives one to me. I don't like taking so much from her; you'd think I was her daughter too.

When she brought me in the muslin frock I gave a little gasp of admiration, and she dimpled with pleasure. "You like it, then?"

"Like it?" I said, "oh, Trixie!" I touched it adoringly; it seemed too fragile to wear.

"Well, put it on and make yourself pretty," she advised; "I must run away now and dress myself."

She stood at the door, smiling at me like a little Dresden shepherdess. She had a pale pinky satiny kimono on (we were dressing for dinner), lined with cerise, and a lovely frilly petticoat, and little pink shoes; and she has got such bewitching baby curls and a naughty lovely smile. Framed in that doorway she looked just adorable. I flung my arms round her and hugged her.

"Trixie, I just love you!" I said. "Why are you so good to me?"

"Good to you?" she said with a little catch in her breath; and then to my surprise there were big tears hanging in her hazel eyes. "Good to you? Oh, my poor lonely little baby!"

I had never seen her look so tender and beautiful before, and all of a sudden I knew how much I had been robbed of. "Oh, Trixie!" I said with sudden yearning. "If only *I* had a mother!" She had sunk into a big chair, and I crouched beside her with my head in her lap, and her arms round me were so comforting and warm.

"Can't I do instead?" she whispered. "Could she love you better?"

"Mother Trixie," I said between a laugh and a sob, and I pulled her face down and kissed it.

"Lie still, Peter," she said dreamily, "and I'll cuddle you again as I used when you were a baby. Such a pretty baby you were, Peter, with your big blue eyes (they're grey now), and soft little curls—you had the tightest wee curls I ever saw on a baby. Jim used to call you 'little piccaninny.'"

"You knew my mother and father well, Trixie?" She didn't seem to hear my question.

"Such a dimpled baby, Peter," she murmured as if she were looking miles and miles away from me; "you used to bury your wee hands in my hair and tug out handfuls. Dolly and Jack were never such babies as you,

but I couldn't take you away from Jim; I thought you'd comfort him, my poor old Jimmy."

"Was he very grieved when my mother died?" I said in a hushed sort of voice.

Trixie's face looked as if she were suffering. "Has he never spoken about your mother to you?" she replied, answering my question with another.

"Never!"

"Nor of—me?" The question seemed a bit of an effort.

"Only when he told me he was sending me to you, and then he——" I stopped hastily.

"Go on," Trixie commanded sharply. "What did he say?"

"Nothing, only he laughed horridly, and—and—he didn't seem to like you very much, Trixie, and that's why I've wondered at your being so good to me. Why are you?"

She rose abruptly and laughed, but her eyes were wet-looking.

"Perhaps it's a debt I owe Jim, and"—she bent and kissed me again—"your mother." And she fluttered away in her pink frills like a big night-moth.

You never seem to get any nearer understanding yourself, Peter. One thing I'm perfectly sure of—father loved Trixie once, and she didn't love him; that's why he hates her now. Perhaps she was my mother's greatest friend, and mother died of jealousy, and Trixie is trying to make it up to me. Oh, well! What's the use of worrying? I don't suppose I'll ever know. But I shall never get over the comicalness of hearing her call father "Jim" in that casual tone of voice. I'd love to see them together; she doesn't seem a bit afraid of him, but then she hasn't seen him for years. I had a letter from him to-day, but all he said was, he was glad my health was improving, and if I ever wanted money just to call on his bankers. I wonder where he got it all from?

I had a lovely long letter from Dick, too; he is in

Sydney now, and he says he will be over here soon. It will be lovely to see him again.

The party to-night was such fun ; it was just an informal one, about twenty or so there. Dolly said I looked awfully nice ; it was the new frock did it, though. Glen rang up at the last minute to say he couldn't come, and I was so disappointed, the party seemed stupid all at once. I tried to be nice to everybody, but Glen is so funny, they all seemed dull beside him, and then all at once the door-bell rang and the maid showed him in. He went and apologised to Dolly, and then came straight to me. I was so glad, for Rex was in the room, and I was terribly afraid he was going to speak to me, so I never let myself get alone for one minute. He never comes near when Glen is about ; that's rather peculiar, considering they are friends. But it's so. It's queer, I'm getting quite hardened to meeting him everywhere I go now, I actually don't mind ; only if ever he comes near me or I have to speak to him more than to say "How-d'ye-do?" I feel horrible all over. But the queerest feeling is to watch him with other girls, to see him leaning over them, his presence around them like a perfume as it used to be round me ; and I watch the silly little fools drop their eyes and blush as I used to.

At first it used to almost make me choke with wrath—how dare he go on so before my face?—but now I am past that. I just feel, when I see him gazing into other girls' eyes, a hot wave of shame that ever I should have been deceived by such a heartless flirt. If I had lost myself to love I could have forgiven him, but that such a shallow cad should have the right to hold me cheaply—how it hurts !

He never even speaks to me now unless he has to, but occasionally, when convention drives us to exchange commonplaces on the weather or cricket, I could almost scream with laughter at the farce of it all ; but I am learning to act well, and he—— Sometimes I think I have dreamt everything, and that I never met him before that night at the dance. Although I hate him I have to admire

his self-possession, but, oh! how I wish he would go away, he makes me despise myself every time I see him.

And the awful part is, we've got to be civil to each other. I daren't show open dislike; as it is, Dolly often comments on my lack of appreciation of her Hercules.

"I can't understand why you don't like him, Peter," she said again one day.

I folded my hands in my lap and set my teeth. "I didn't say I disliked him, Dolly," I said.

"You can't bluff me," Dolly retorted, "and all the girls rave over him."

"The more reason for me not to," I said, hating myself. The more I learn about him the more I despise him and myself.

"What I'm trying to piece together——" Dolly commented, nibbling a finger.

"Oh, do change the subject!" I said impatiently. "I'm heartily sick of hearing the song of Rex Ware; I've no doubt no such perfect archangel ever walked the earth without wings before, but you can't help admitting that to sit for ever listening to his praises gets monotonous."

Unconsciously, I suppose, my voice had grown bitter, for Dolly leaned over and said in a curious voice: "Peter, do you *hate* him?"

That cold fear gripped me again. Di, can you think what it is to be always haunted by the dread of self-betrayal? But I forced my lips to a natural smile; fear is the best teacher of guile.

"Don't be absurd, Dolly. But I get tired of those paragons who are run after by silly girls till their heads are turned and——"

"Rex is not that sort, Peter, and you know it," Dolly broke in indignantly. "A less conceited fellow you never met, and it's a wonder too, for you can't deny he's one of the finest men you ever saw. He flirts a bit, I suppose, but what can you expect?—the fuss girls make over his face, it serves them right. But it hasn't altered him to his pals, and men say he's as straight as a die in business

matters. I can tell you of a whole heap of people who know Rex Ware a jolly sight better than you do, who think the world of him; I do myself." She flung back her head defiantly. "Rex and I have known each other since we were tiny kids; he was my first sweetheart; and a nicer, truer, honester fellow you could not wish to meet, so there, Peter Delaney!" And she stalked out of the room.

How queer it is to think Rex could be to Dolly what Dick is to me.

Glen put in a good word for him, too, to-night. He had been kept late by some case or other that wanted looking into further, and he didn't think when he rang up he would be able to get away at all.

"Why did you try?" I said reproachfully. "You'll tire yourself out if you go at such a pace."

"Tire myself!" he laughed like a boy at the idea. "Besides, I hadn't as much to do as I expected, Rex took a hump on his shoulders. He's a great fellow," and he blew a cloud of cigarette smoke to the skies in appreciation.

We had all wandered outside, and he and I were down by the lily-pond. It was very beautiful there, the heliotrope coloured flowers held their stiff satin leaves like rosettes on the surface of the water, and the big camellia-bushes made little Noah's arks among the filmy willows. Every now and then a trill of laughter would come from somewhere or other; they had scattered all over the garden.

We didn't talk very much, except by looking at each other every now and then. Can't you say a lot with looks, Di? It didn't seem as if we were silent. I plaited him a crown of wild oats and I hung it on his head, and it dropped all on one ear and gave him a dissolute, drunken appearance that made us both laugh insanely, and I had to put it straight for him, and once my hand brushed against his lips and he glanced up quickly at me, and I felt confused. I wonder why? It was a nice, thrilly sort of quiver up my arm. I like him because he never

touches me ; if he did I'd hate him ; but because he doesn't, sometimes when our fingers brush by accident, and once when he bumped my head crawling under the willows to look at the cygnets, I rather liked it.

He played a while with the end of my scarf ; nearly all men seem to like touching something that belongs to a girl. Suddenly he said : " What pretty hands you have ! "

" Hands ! " I echoed blankly. " What's pretty about them—burnt brown old things ? "

" They have nice dimples. "

" But they are so big, " I urged, just to make him go on talking, it's so seldom Glen says anything complimentary. " Look ! " I laid one hand beside his on his knee, and he laughed outright and put his on top of mine and hid it.

" Big ! " he laughed again, " why, it's lost in mine, " and he curled his fingers round it ; and suddenly we both felt shy—at least, I did—and he grew silent and didn't say a word when I drew my hand away.

The silence got oppressive this time, so I suggested we should go and look for the others, and he said he supposed he'd better hunt up Rex and get a move on, they had to go back to the office before they went home. I made no comment beyond a sort of grunt, and he looked curiously at me. He opened his mouth, and on second thoughts shut it again, but on third thoughts he said :—

" You don't like Rex ? "

I shrugged my shoulders. " I neither like nor dislike him. "

" I see, " he said slowly, and changed the conversation.

But I know he was not satisfied. He has been talking about me to Rex, I'm certain of it. What could he have said ?

They went away together. As Glen held my hand on the veranda saying good-bye (I had simply bowed to Rex), he said : " Will you be home Tuesday night ? "

" Yes, I think, " I replied.

"Then may I come up?"

"Of course."

I stood on the porch listening to the sound of their footsteps crunching fainter on the gravel. But what surprised me was, I saw on Rex's face as Glen held my hand a look almost of hatred.

Why should he have looked like that when he doesn't care?

CHAPTER XIX

Glen Waxes Sentimental

It was Saturday evening. The boys had come to tennis and stayed to tea. About seven Ralph said suddenly to Dolly :

"Dolly, will you be a perfect devil on sevenpence-ha'penny?"

"As how?" Dolly queried in a muffled voice from the hammock. "Persian, dear, would you mind sitting somewhere else but on my head, it's rather detrimental to conversation?"

"I was thinking of the river," Ralph replied, ignoring the rest of her remark. "It really is a lovely night, and Glen and Peter could come too. Mrs. Danish, I presume, has no qualms about its respectability?"

"No, only about its safety with two such scatterbrains," Dolly retorted, "but I dare say we could soothe them by utterly misrepresenting your characters. What do you say, Peterkin, shall we go?"

"I think it would be rather nice, Dolly," I said.

And it was. One of those drowsy warm nights when the stars seem so big and bright you think they will fall on top of you. We walked down to the boating-shed and routed out a noble skiff called *The Dolly*—for luck, as Ralph explained—and we all bundled in. Ralph started to row, Glen sat in the I-forget-the-name-of the end, and Dolly and I in the other, and pulled the ropes that steer it. We made an awfully erratic course.

"Ralph," Dolly said, "what makes it wobble so?"

"Your peculiar manner of keeping her straight," Ralph replied, as we shaved another boat by half an inch.

"Glen, take those lines away from her, or there'll be a new notice in the obituary column to-morrow. Dolly, light of my life, will you allow Glen to sit next to Miss Delaney—to please me?"

"Not me!" Dolly retorted, "but I'll do it to please Glen."

"Don't trouble on my account," Glen said serenely. All we could see of him now was a big blur and the red end of his pipe.

I felt myself colour with rage, and even Dolly was surprised for a second, but she replied calmly: "Sorry, can't help it; the Church's orders. Get up!"

They exchanged seats at imminent risk of capsizing, and I breathed a sigh of relief when the transfer had been made, but I watched the bank steadily; if he thought I was going to speak to him after a remark like that he was making the mistake of his life.

We went past the City Bridge, past the 'Varsity boatshed; at the back of the Exhibition a clump of gum-trees stood stiff in pleasure at their own reflection. All the way willows curled their long green hair in the water, which was like polished ebony. Boats nosed about with lights on the ends like dogs sniffing round for a bone. Now and again we'd pass one tucked away under the willows, and catch a glimpse of a mixture of black coat and white blouse—it isn't polite to get more than a glimpse.

"Phew! it's hot," said Ralph, and took off his coat.

Back again now down to the weir. The rushes shut us in like a young forest. A train coming from the Hills rushed by to the station—a rocket, scattering stars all the way.

"I wish," Ralph sighed, "I'd worn a belt, these braces cut my shoulders infernally."

A black swan went past like a gunshot. I dabbled my hands in the water, and wondered if I could really see the eyes of drowned folk shining up at me from the mud beneath; once when a floating weed caught in my hand I gasped, it coiled round my fingers like a girl's hair.

Ralph had stopped rowing and was bending forward talking in a low tone to Dolly, who for once didn't appear to be laughing.

"What are you thinking of?" Glen asked abruptly.

"That I have a deep sympathy for your mother."

"For being my mother?"

"Because you have grown too big to be spanked; she must want to dreadfully sometimes."

"Do you feel like that?"

I nodded. He smoked on, but insensibly I felt less cross. I believe because his prickly mood was passing; he has such a queer effect on me, I am like a barometer to register the changes in his mood. But he makes most people feel the same. He turned and smiled at me, and my mercury would veer round to Fair. I hated myself for it.

"I was up near your place last Sunday," he said.

I nearly said: "Why didn't you come in?" but some last remnant of decent pride made me answer indifferently: "Oh! out for a walk?"

"Yes, with Harris."

"It was a nice day."

"Mph!"

He shot a glance at me between his lids and then laughed a short, self-scornful laugh. "Harris couldn't make out the direction at all; about a hundred yards from your house he stopped and said: 'What the——' well, I won't say it, 'have you brought me out to this God-forsaken wilderness for?' He mopped his face and eyed me with sudden suspense. 'Look here, Glen, I believe you've got a girl out this way, have you now?'"

"How funny!" I laughed, feeling I would like to jab a hatpin into Glen.

"Of course I had to turn round and go straight back."

"Well," I said, plaiting the ropes of the tiller, "you didn't want to come any farther, did you?"

He didn't answer, but I could feel his eyes on me, and somehow they made me look up, but when I

met them my own dropped suddenly and my cheeks burned.

It shows the hypnotic effect he has on me, that it wasn't till I got home it dawned on me he has awful cheek to say things like that. Besides, if he likes me enough to want to come near our place, why didn't he come out and see us?—he knows he's always welcome. I wouldn't care how often he came; he amuses me.

There's no doubt about it, men are queer.

As we pulled back to the landing-place Dolly began to sing softly, "Two eyes of grey." I clasped my hands round my knees and gazed ahead. Glen gazed at me, I felt him.

"I'd give the world," Dolly crooned, "if it could be my fate

" 'To dry the tears that dim your eyes
And make their sweetness glow with love for me.' "

Her voice fell on the silence like a kiss.

Abruptly Glen leant forward and said (I never knew he could speak like that): "When you look so, I know what the fellow felt who wrote that song."

CHAPTER XX

Dick Comes to Adelaide

I HAD been out playing tennis at Rees's, and when I got in the door the maid told me Mr. Harcourt was in the drawing-room.

At last my old Dick!

I simply flew for the room, but when I dashed through the door and found it packed with people I stopped suddenly and felt shy. But Dick got up and came to me and grabbed both my hands, staring all the time as if I'd gone black or yellow since he saw me last.

"Peter!" he said incredulously. "Peter! Well, I'm damned!" And he said it with intense conviction.

"Dick, I'm so glad!" I cried; and everybody laughed. But of course I was only answering his meaning.

However, we couldn't stand there all day, so we disentangled and found seats somewhere; still, as we went Dick contrived to say to me: "Peter, you have grown a beauty!" He didn't seem to be able to get past that fact all the day.

It's so lovely to have him here. I don't see such a terrific lot of him, because he has a good deal of business in the day-time, and he spends a lot of time with his old Marjorie, but he manages to get round to Curranjee fairly often. I think it's a bit too often for Glen's taste. He has been so queer lately, I don't think he likes me as much as he used. Sometimes I think he cares a bit for Dolly. Several times lately when he has come he has talked a lot more to her than to me; it may have been because Dick was there, but still— Of course I don't mind; I think jealousy's despicable, but—well, I don't think he

need turn, if he is turning, quite so suddenly; it isn't what I feel that matters, it's the look of it to other people. He has made them think, home and people who come here often, that I'm his special fancy out of the household, and to be palpably cut out is humiliating.

Not that I blame Dolly one atom, only all the same it makes me feel a bit sore against her. It's very unjust, but, to be honest with myself, I know I do feel wroth with her on occasions. I feel so crossish and out of sorts to-day. It's odd that one can feel hopelessly miserable without a reason, at least a reason one can put into words. It's a soul-ache, like tiredness, that you just feel without being able to locate. I'm cross with myself and everything and everybody else.

Oh dear! how nice it would be if we could take mental Epsom salts. Peter, you're a snappy old pig!

But I don't care. Glen's a beast, he hasn't been near us for nearly a fortnight now, hasn't even rung up. Dolly saw him last Tuesday in the street, and he took her to afternoon tea. I wanted to murder her when she told me.

Everything's gone wrong. I was going to a tennis party and it's pouring with rain. Dolly's down at the 'Varsity. Maria has killed two of her ducklings to-day by trampling on them; I've never known her do such a thing before. I tore my pet blue frock on a nail in the veranda chair, the telephone won't work, I've read everything decent in the house, and even Trixie's bad-tempered.

It's rather humorous. While no one knew anything about it he was perfectly sweet to me, and now that people are beginning to tumble to the state of affairs he is cooling off—I'd like to stick pins into him.

It's hateful being a girl. You're utterly helpless until a man proposes outright. They can amuse themselves to the top of their bent and then get out, and no one can say anything; and, especially if you like them at all, it's hard to keep them in their proper place. Besides, you never know at first whether they are only amusing themselves or trying to put in good work.

It's very perplexing to be a girl;

I don't care ; Glen has no business to go on like that with Dolly in front of my very nose after the things he's said. Not that it makes any difference to me.

We're going to have a fancy dress ball in a marquee on the lawn in a few weeks—masked. I wonder what I'll go as.

If he rings up again I'll tell Pearl to say I'm not at home and she doesn't know when I will be. So there, Glen Morris ! And if he doesn't ring up I won't dance with him at the tennis dance.

Peter, you're a logical female;

CHAPTER XXI

Dick Laughs

PETER, you're an ass, there's no getting away from it. After all my fine resolutions! It's perfectly exasperating that any man should have such a strong personality; I'm just like putty in his hands. And I don't think I even like him. But you see I was expecting Lucy Rees to ring me up about tennis the next day, whether we were to play on her court or ours, so when the telephone rang I went to save anyone else bothering; I was sure it was I that was wanted. So it was, but not by Lucy. This is the dignified encounter:

I take down the receiver. "Hallo!"

"Is that Dr. Danish's?"

"Yes."

"Oh, hallo!" with a quick change of tone. "Is that you? Morris speaking. How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you; how are you?" ("Peter, you fool!" to myself.)

"All right. I say, are you doing anything particular to-night?"

"Me?"—meekly and truthfully. "No."

"All right, I'll come up, may I?" (The "may I?" only a matter of form.)

Me, helplessly and inwardly raging: "If you like."

"Right! See you later. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

I hang up the receiver, and then recover my lost wits, and give Peter a piece of my mind—too late. *Aren't I an idiot, Di?*

Anyway, I determined I wouldn't be too nice with him ; I'd let him see he couldn't behave as he chose with me ; I'd be civil but cold.

You wouldn't be surprised to hear I kept my word, Di ? Oh no ! I was sitting on the veranda day-dreaming when he came, and I'm sure it was that softened my mood. Sunsets are so sad, they always make me feel as if nothing was worth while ; it seems, in the face of that big expanse of sky, so futile to spoil the little life we have with tempers and misunderstandings.

It was a grey sunset too, with a hint of pink like a tired woman's face flushing with surprise, and I saw it between the flowers of a huge tree-rose and a bush of sweet peas. The peas were almost cerise, that lovely deep pink-red, and gradually they flooded my mind with their colour. Have you ever thought a pinkness, Di ? It's a lovely warm, vague sensation in your mind like bathing your limbs in sunshine, only it's more dreamy and seductive than crude day ; if there were such a thing you'd call it sun-moonlight.

I couldn't stay cross with those sweet peas in front of me. And then he walked up the steps. His very walk is aggressive. My heart gave a bump against my ribs and then felt like undigested ice-cream.

"Good-evening," he said, and stood looking down at me.

I smiled up without answering, and for a few minutes we stayed so. It seemed as if we'd done it centuries ago the same. Isn't it disconcerting, how familiar things sometimes are ? It makes you feel as if you weren't yourself at all, but a person in a play speaking a set part.

"Won't you sit down ?" I said.

"Thank you," he replied, and then somehow the banality of our conversation struck us both, and we laughed ; and you must admit, Di, it's impossible to be cold and dignified after a good laugh, so we talked away just like we always do, as nice as nice could be.

But he chooses such peculiar topics now, he's always

talking about girls. He used not. And he takes an almost morbid interest in Dolly and Ralph. One time he said :

"Being engaged's a rotten game, don't you think?"

"I don't know," I said; "I've never been."

"Well, of course," he said hastily; "neither have I."

"Why of course?"

"Why not?"

I picked some banksia and aimed the tufts at Foxy Bill, who nearly wagged his tail off in appreciation of the compliment.

"An engagement," he pursued, "is such a responsibility. It means taking another person eternally into consideration; a fellow can't only study his own convenience then."

"That would be good for you," I suggested.

"But damned unpleasant. Really, I beg your pardon."

"Do you suppose I haven't heard worse words than that when I was a boy?" I said disdainfully. "Don't you be damned silly."

He frowned. (I like that savage furrow between his brows.) "I dislike to hear a woman swear."

"Then why talk to one who does?" His tone had ruffled me.

He never turned a hair, but replied after a moment's consideration: "That is a pertinent question."

"Not to say impertinent?"

He didn't answer, and I felt suddenly ashamed. I leant a little towards him, and touched him lightly on the knee.

"I didn't mean to be rude." (Peter, you are soft.)

"Another point is," he added later, "it spoils things a bit when everybody knows about it, don't you think? They all discuss you and wonder what you see in each other and when you're going to get married, and set the town by the ears with their gossip, if they see you talking to anyone else."

I nodded sympathetically.

"I reckon it's much nicer when no one knows anything about it, like now, don't you?"

I was saved from a reply by Dick, who descended upon us with warm greetings. I wonder if Glen knows what perfectly awful things he says? He must; he's too clever to be a fool; or is he so clever that he is?

I don't think he loves me; we're neither of us a bit sentimental, and he shouldn't make remarks like that. I can never love anyone else again; I can't even remember properly what it felt like. Truly they are right who call love a midsummer madness. I think I just interest him, because he says I'm different from other girls. Poor me, Di! if he only knew how true that is!

Of course I was awfully pleased to see Dick—I always am—but we didn't seem as jolly as usual, or perhaps I was tired or something. Glen wouldn't talk, either, after he came. It's really perfectly absurd the way he objects to me being civil to any other man; and he'd die sooner than admit it too; but he does mind—and Dick more than anyone.

He got up to go quite early, and that made me cross with Dick. Women are beastly unjust. But as we stood at the veranda steps he said so that Dick couldn't hear:

"They've asked me to be a member for the Firefly dance; would you care to go?"

"Oh, thank you!" I said, surprised and pleased. "It's very good——"

"All right," he cut in short, "I'll go on. Good-bye." He shook my hand and went.

I enjoyed the talk with Dick very much, but all the same I couldn't help wishing Glen hadn't shot off like that.

Just as he was going Dick said to me with a grin:

"I say, Peter, let him down lightly."

"What do you mean?" I said, feeling pink though it was dark and he couldn't tell;

But Dick only laughed.

CHAPTER XXII

The Firefly Dance

I'M cross—cross—cross—cross as forty-four sticks all laid crosswise! I'm sick of Glen; I never want to see or speak to him again. Silly old thing! I despise people who don't know their own minds. If he thinks Dolly's nicer than me he can have his old Dolly. I'm sure I don't want to have any more to do with him.

All the same it's rotten luck, for I was getting to like him, and he is, bar Dick, the nicest fellow I know, and a long way the cleverest. I love them clever. I don't see why he should be tired of me, I'm sure I haven't altered; liking's a queer thing, the way it comes and goes. And I'm sure Dolly likes Ralph a lot better than Glen, only, of course, it flatters her pride to have more than one dangling after her—the more the merrier.

Oh, well! thank goodness, I've got Dick left.

Glen took us to the Firefly. I enjoyed it in a way, Di, but—not the way I wanted to; and that's the only sort of enjoyment that counts. I had such a pretty frock, too; it was pink, and I carried pink roses, and the decorations were the loveliest I have seen—they were all pink and fireflies of electric light. The whole room was canopied with them, the streams starting from a great pink globe in the centre where the fireflies were thickest, fluttering round it on invisible wires, like moths round a candle.

He asked Dick and Dolly, and Jack and his sister. Dolly said she and his mother had only been back from England a few weeks: She is not like him at all, rather handsome in a bold, dark way. She had a grey frock on, skin-tight. I don't like her. She stared at me quite hard

when I was dancing with him. I think someone must have been telling her about me. I'm sure Glen never would. It's impertinent of her to look at me like that ; her brother's friends are none of her business. I wished he would introduce me, just so that I could retaliate ; I'm not afraid of her—I've learnt how to deal with girls who try to snub me now. But of course he didn't. Dolly says she's not a bad girl, but she thinks the whole world was made for her convenience. It seems a family trait. Dolly went up to her and welcomed her back, and she was quite effusive. I suppose she's nice enough when it suits her. I believe she wanted to be introduced to me ; I saw her begin to move my way with Dolly, but just then the first waltz started and my partner swept me off.

Glen booked three dances with me before he asked Dolly, but perhaps that was only because he didn't want me to know how many he had with her. I believe they had more than three. I'm a fool to mind, because I had plenty of other men to dance with ; but all the time I was envying Glen's partners, and I was so ruffled that when I danced with him myself I was perfectly horrid, although I wanted to make a better impression than any. Jealousy is a stupid thing, it makes you disagreeable when you are only unhappy. I suppose I was a bit jealous, to be honest, but no one likes losing a pal. Are all women as stupid as I, I wonder ?

But if there's one person in the world at this minute I'd like to pulverise and then sell as baking-powder, it's Freda Morris. I feel furious every time I think of her. The way she eyed me up and down made every fibre in me stand up in protest, and once, when she passed me in a two-step, she whispered something that made her partner turn and cast a critical glance at me, and I caught a fragment of his reply which sounded uncommonly like "—good taste."

I will *not* be discussed as if I were a toy Glen had home on approval, and the sooner he understands it the better. It's rather humorous, though, if she's got a suspicion I

might be brought into the family just when he's beginning to have had enough.

But I suppose, if they idolise him the way Dolly says they do, they'd naturally cast a wary eye on any female he dangles after—though that word sounds ridiculous applied to Glen; his method is rather to sit still and dangle the female after him.

He had a perfectly beastly mood on; sneered at every mortal thing on the face of the earth, laughed at everything off it; told me what a nice girl Dolly was; how he'd no time for girls himself—was determined to die an ancient bachelor, and would probably go to Europe next year for good.

And I? I writhed in speechless exasperation and beamed on him like an electric bulb. I wish I were a man, I'd—I'd stamp on him!

Dick and I had some great waltzes together (they tell me I'm a good dancer now, and he certainly is), but we sat most of the other dances out in a jolly little corner he found, and once in a glorious motor; but you had to put in early for the motor, it was rather rushed.

Dick worried me a little; he said father was looking ill when he last saw him, he had caught a chill and had a dry, racking cough. "I hope the poor chap's not in for consumption," he added; "is it in the family?"

"Now, Dick," I pouted scornfully, "my knowledge of my family is so full and complete——"

And then we had to laugh.

"But I say, Peter," Dick said, when the joke of me going round like an unregistered dog had ceased to tickle us, "do you mean to say you don't know any more yet? Don't the Danishes enlighten you at all?"

"Not an atom!" I shook my head convincingly. "Dolly doesn't know anything, and Trixie gets upset if I ask questions, so I don't now. It just seems as if they had adopted me for some unexplained reason."

"You can't deny it's funny," Dick urged in excuse of

his mirth. "And are you going to plank yourself down on them for ever?"

"They won't hear of me going away," I replied. "To mention that upsets Trixie worse than ever; she says now she's got me she's going to keep me. What do you make of it, Dick?"

"Give it up!" Dick responded promptly. "Sounds like a family skeleton, doesn't it?"

"It *do*," I agreed.

"Never mind," he comforted me, "you won't bother 'em for long, with your face, Peter. Is it coming to a wedding this time?"

"Idiot!" I stormed.

"Well, he's a nice chap; I like him."

"It's more than he does you!" I couldn't help saying. But Dick is aggravating at times. And just as he was saying it (we were in the motor this time), Glen and Dolly went past. I felt as furious as could be, and Glen looked mad too, for though he couldn't see us under the dark hood he recognised my voice. I laughed on purpose. I wonder if he was as wild as I was? How deadly funny!

Then Dick replied to my last remark: "That's because he's jealous of me."

I wonder if he is.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Green-eyed Monster

I SAID I'd never be jealous, Di, and after all I am. It's no use lying about it—I am.

I'm raging, madly, furiously jealous! I never knew it could be such an awful thing; it kills me by inches, and the worse it makes me feel the more I think about it. I can't put it out of my mind; I suppose I am weak-willed. But, oh! how I hate her!

We were at a party to-night, and he talked to Dolly all the evening. When I see him contemplating her a lump of fury rises in my throat, and I think if I could get my fingers round that plump neck of hers I would squeeze and squeeze till her inane, clever-looking face went purple, and the blood squelched out between my fingers. It's wicked, I know, and she has been good to me, but that's what I feel; and in the middle of it someone will ask me if I will have some more butter, and once Dolly inquired what colour my new dress was going to be, and I could see the blood so thick on my fingers I answered "Red," and Dolly gave a little shriek—"You needn't hurl it at me in that tone!" she said; "you sound like Charlotte Corday or Joan of Arc ordering me to execution." I wished I had been.

I suppose I am a fool to want him if he's stopped liking me. People always seem to think women are fools who try for a man they want—unless they get him. The ridicule of the bad loser who has shown his hand is theirs; and the dreadfulest is, the man may laugh about it with

the successful girl. Why don't the men women want always love them? I wonder why it is absurd, two women after the same man—people always laugh. They don't laugh if it is two men after the same girl—they are sorry for the men; I wonder why? I suppose it's the old fiction lingering that women are to sit at home and wait till a man asks them, and then like him whoever he is. But I want Glen, not anybody else. Why shouldn't I try to make him love me? I don't know how. Is it because I was brought up so queerly, or because I'm one of the poor sort of women who don't know how to treat men? I ought to be able to win him away from Dolly; other girls can do such things. Why, Gwen Manners told me she did it last month on her holiday, and she did it only for fun—I call that fiendish—but if she could do it even when she didn't care, why can't I when I do care?

Perhaps that's the reason. When you like anyone you are handicapped in their presence, that is, if they don't care about you. I suppose because you are so anxious to make a good impression you become artificial. Instead of just being yourself and chancing it, as you do with other people, you are trying all the time to see if they approve of you as you are, and if they don't you try to alter.

It never struck me before; I suppose Dolly and I look as funny to outsiders as the two Dots. I never quite realised the pathos I was laughing at there. You've got to be jealous yourself to understand; people who have always been lucky in love can't. How close on the borderline of the ridiculous does tragedy lie! Tragedy is incongruous in the world. I'm sure the Creator never meant it to be here; He made the world gay and pretty, and sorrow crept in when His back was turned; there's a lot of sense in that old Eden story. To sit in the garden as I am doing now, with the sun kissing the back of my neck, and the smell of the mignonette nearly drowning me in its sweetness, and the scarlet and pink beds with

the pale sky-blue of the delphiniums in the distance merging into the pale-blue skyline, and to have a big ache under my blouse (just beneath the sternum, at the level of the third rib, etc., as the physiology books tell you), seems so awfully incongruous. And yet there are dead violets in the beds.

CHAPTER XXIV

By the Lily-pond

WHAT a storm in a teacup! Glen doesn't care about Dolly after all. He came up last night, and Dick came too, and Glen wouldn't let him come near me. He talked hard to me the whole time exclusively, too, so that the others couldn't join in. He ignored Dolly to the verge of being rude.

He wouldn't have behaved like that if he'd liked her, would he?

I believe he guessed I was hurt about Dolly; he is very clever, and he was trying to make me see there was no need. Of course he didn't say anything outright, but he kept making little remarks that showed Dolly didn't interest him particularly and that he thought she was going to marry Ralph.

"What do you think of the idea?" I asked once.

"I think it would be a splendid thing for both of them," he said frankly.

"I think so too."

He was niceness itself; his very, very best behaviour was spread out for my benefit, and if you knew him, Di, you'd realise what that means from Glen. Fate gave him one of the most charming manners I've ever met, but he has been so spoiled that he seldom thinks it necessary to air it, and affects a bluntness and insouciance that at times border on sheer insolence.

And to-night he chose his pretty manner. When Dolly suggested a walk in the garden he managed to lose them—not that they made the manœuvre particularly difficult; Dolly really is a nice girl. We went down to

the lily-pond as usual ; Dolly reckons I've got a mortgage on the place. We sat still a long while without talking properly, and we threw stones into the water with a plop-splash that set all the grandpapa frogs protesting loudly.

"Doesn't this remind you of board ship?" he said with a wave of his hand that took in all the exquisite quiet and the stars.

I nodded. "Doesn't it seem hundreds of years ago?"

"What a very old woman you must be," he teased.

"But it does seem funny to think what a little while we've known each other, doesn't it?" I insisted.

"Very."

"To think a year ago neither of us knew of the other's existence!"

"To think I've only been alive so few months!" Glen mused.

I frowned. "Don't be rude!"

"Whatever was rude about that?"

"You know it was, and you needn't put on that amazed expression. It doesn't take me in one bit."

"Women are the sheer limit!" Glen complained. "Try to say something pretty to them and they flash round and accuse you of being rude. What would you like me to say—that it's the one grief of my life I ever set eyes on you?"

"Yes." I tried to smother a smile. "I don't like romances, I like truth."

"But I gave you that the first time."

"Oh, don't be stupid!" I said desperately. "Are you coming to our ball?"

"If you'll dance with me all the time."

"Goat!" I called him, and commenced a fusillade of gum-blossom. He chased me round the lily-pond, and after we had stopped laughing and picked the stamens out of each other's hair we went on discussing the dance. He's dying for me to go dressed as I used in the West. He says I've told him so much about when I was a boy he's anxious to see me. Shall I, Di? Would it be the

thing, I wonder? I should feel all right, I'm so used to them, but would other people who don't know be shocked? Of course we will all be masked, and I could even slip away before twelve and put another dress on. The only bother now would be my hair, but I can bundle it up under a wig, I suppose. He seems quite keen on it, but I wouldn't promise. I'll ask Dolly.

When we got back to the lawn we found Rex there too. It made me feel horribly uncomfortable, for my frock had a big green stain on it where I fell down when Glen chased me, and my hair was all pulled about.

Rex only shook hands quietly and resumed his seat, but I knew his glance had taken me in from head to foot, and he looked savage. The air seemed horribly electric, and the others must have felt it too, for conversation was very strained, and they soon got up to go.

When they were gone, Dolly said to me, as we folded up the chairs, "Some people are fools."

I took no notice. But it takes more than silence to daunt Dolly.

"Whatever you can see in Glen Morris compared with Rex!"

"There's no comparison," I retorted.

"There isn't," Dolly agreed. "You're a fool!"

"Thank you!" I said.

Dolly folded up a chair so viciously that she jammed her thumb. "I could box your ears sometimes, Peter," she said, sucking it industriously. "Ugh! the brute does hurt! Why are you such a fiend to Rex? The man's madly, insanely in love with you; I was absolutely frightened when you came back with Glen to-night, his face looked like murder. And you—you won't even speak to him beyond a cool 'Good-evening, Mr. Ware.' And it's to get that crumb of greeting and watch you flirting with Glen that the poor fellow comes up here. I suppose you think it's me he comes to see. You heartless little brat! Rot! Pretend to me he doesn't love you."

"He does not," I raged.

"Pooh! He'd marry you to-morrow if you'd let him. Dare deny it!"

I went scarlet. "Mind your own business," I said, and flew to my room.

Oh! why, why, why must he be a friend of Dolly's? Can't I ever escape from him? I hate him! Why can't he stop away instead of coming here making Dolly say things like that?

But, oh! what did he think to-night? Does he dare imagine I let Glen say things to me like he used?

Ah! How sweet life would be if—if—— Always that little if!

CHAPTER XXV

Glen Washes Up

ISN'T there a fascination in watering the garden? I decided to give some of it a bath about four o'clock. I love to watch the water drifting like spray over the beds, washing the faces of the hollyhocks and dahlias. Dahlias have got faces with frizzy negressy curls like mine used to be. When the drops hang on the geranium blooms they look like a pendant of rubies and diamonds.

I had a white frock on, and I soon regretted it. I think I got more washing than the garden, but I do like to put my hand in front of the nozzle and feel the force that is behind the feather-diamond drift. I turned it on Foxy Bill once, and how he did run! But the flowers all looked so fresh and perky after it, it was like giving them afternoon tea.

I wonder why nothing at all makes one happy. Or perhaps it was the scent of the carnations.

"Peach-tree," I said gravely to a double, pale-pink one thick with glory, "if you don't stop looking so idiotically pleased with yourself I'll sing."

I laughed, and someone else laughed too. I wheeled quickly, and Glen got the hose full in his face—I'd forgotten I held it.

"Here, I say!" he began, ducking. I dropped it, and the creature began to jump with the pressure of the water like they sometimes do, and squirmed all over the place after us like a snake, hissing jets of water as we fled.

I wiped him down with his handkerchief and mine too, and he was as fidgety as could be about it. He would

insist on having his face dried properly. I believe it was because he liked the feel of my fingers.

"It serves you right, you know," I said, getting in first. "You shouldn't come up so silently and startle folk. And will you please go and turn the tap off or the place will be flooded."

I picked up the hose and directed the last squirt at a clump of cannas standing up very stiff and shiny and conceited. After it they leant back against the fence, looking exhausted.

"It is," I said dropping the hose, "a delightful surprise to see you. Dolly is out."

"And you?"

"I'm going to get the tea. All the maids are off; it is a holiday, you know."

"And you?" he said again.

"You may grind the coffee-beans," I capitulated, "or empty out the tea-leaves. We can go for a stroll round the garden first. But, seriously, I thought you were going to that picnic."

"And, seriously, so were you."

"Yes, but I was in bed all the morning with a bilious attack. Prosaic, but the truth."

"And I had work to do at the office."

"Prosaic, but *not* the truth," I commented. "I believe Dolly told——" I stopped hastily. I had nearly said that she had told him I was not going. What a conceited idiot I should have sounded!

His face was inscrutable. "You never know, do you?" he said.

He helped me get the tea. Only Dr. Danish and Trixie were at home, and they were going out in the evening. It was comical to see him carrying in a trayful of dishes. I spent so much time laughing at him and telling him where to put the things, I could have done it by myself in half the time.

"Why will you insist on being so absurd?" I asked him once.

His red brown eyes laughed at me, but his mouth was serious. "I'm seeing what it feels like to be married," he explained.

"Oh!" I said, feeling my cheeks redden. "I see! 'Five years ago I used your soap, since when——'"

"There is another alternative," he suggested.

"Speak no such horror!" I fenced. We kept up this nonsense all the time; we really did enjoy ourselves.

I insisted on tying a large apron round him when he helped me fry the chops, and he did look funny. Trixie and the Doctor laughed at us during tea, but we didn't mind. And afterwards we washed up, and I made him put the dishes away under my direction. I said if he was out for local colour he might as well do the thing properly, and he agreed with me.

It did seem so cosy, too, in the big, dark kitchen. It was really rather dark, for something went wrong with the electric light and we were reduced to candles, but I'd never felt so homelike with Glen before, we seemed so close to each other. I think he felt it too. And once when he was taking a glass dish from me he did it very slowly, as if his fingers didn't like letting go mine.

When that was all done he said it was his turn to command, and we were going for a motor ride, so we went. It was a beautiful drive, but we didn't talk much, and when we got home we had to get our own supper.

Here I took charge again. We were both ravenously hungry, so what do you think we decided to have for supper, Di? Omelettes! It was perfectly daft, of course, but then we both were daft this night, so I started to make them. Glen sat on the table and watched me, and got all over flour. I let him help beat up the eggs, and we were laughing like a couple of children playing at housekeeping—and Glen had only lit one candle this time—when Dolly and Rex came in back from the picnic!

I felt horrible for a minute. Dolly teased us frankly, but I didn't mind that—it was Rex. He stood quietly in the doorway, but his eyes stormed mine. He was

challenging me to remember another room I used to do cooking in, and when my helper wasn't Glen. Why will he make me remember? What good does it do?

When we were shaking hands on the veranda I said, "Hasn't it been a lovely holiday?"

"Great!" Glen said. "Wouldn't you like to spend 'em all that way?"

"Just our two selves?" I cried in mock horror. "Don't you think it would be monotonous?"

We looked at each other, then we looked away.

"Possibly," he said, "but," he added, "not probably."

CHAPTER XXVI

Ralph Seeks Advice

DI, I've two huge jokes to tell you. First of all, we're asked to a party at the Morris's. Isn't it huge? I know it's being given for me, too, that's what's tickling Dolly and me to death. I never told you that I met Freda Morris, did I, Di? She was round at Lucy Rees' to tennis one day, and made herself tremendously agreeable to me. She would have been impertinently curious if I had let her. I didn't. She told Dolly her cousin was rather a haughty young lady. Fancy me being called haughty! Dolly simply squealed. I think it's huge myself. But she's not going to patronise me; I'm not going to be sampled by the family, like a cake, to see if I'll interfere with their precious Glen's digestion. If I want Glen I'll have him without consulting them, providing he wants me—which he doesn't.

She told me very sweetly, as we parted, I must come and see them some time, and I responded it was the one thing in the world needful to complete my happiness, or words to that effect, and mentally I added, "Will I, just!" I suppose this invitation is the outcome. I don't want to go, but Dolly says I simply must. She wants to, and she declares she wouldn't have the face to turn up without me, since it's me out of the family they want to see. So we've accepted. Hang the Morrises!

Dolly says they have a lovely home and it's sure to be a nice party, and that's some comfort, but it's awful to be on inspection.

Oh dear! I do detest Glen sometimes. He doesn't want me to go, though, that partly consoles me. I don't

know whether he's afraid they will put my back up, or whether I'll vent my probable dislike of them on him. I believe myself he's just annoyed with Freda for taking a hand in his game at all. It spoils the bloom of things when you've got to let third parties into your garden grown for two. Glen was right, it is better fun when people don't know anything about it.

The other joke is Ralph. He's in love with Dolly. I'm simply certain of it; he's all but told me, though not in so many words.

I was fishing in the lily-pond this afternoon when he came. Really you'd think I lived there; every time I talk to you I seem to have been down to the lily-pond, don't I, Di? It is such fun fishing in it, though. I suppose you'll think me a baby. I use a bent pin and bits of bread. You should just see the way those goldfishes rush the party; they consider it a highly novel kind of tea-fight. They do fight, too, for best place at the pin, and the way they wag their red tails (they're double-tailed, too—Jack got them in Melbourne) is downright exhilarating. I was so absorbed one day in watching them enjoy themselves, I tumbled in. There was nobody about to rescue me, either. Ralph said I ought to time these little opportunities better.

This afternoon I was sprawling on my face, crumpling all my clean white dress, and daring Foxy Bill to jump in. The old coward just sniffed at me and tied his backbone into knots by way of apology; he hates water. I couldn't have looked very dignified, and I'd like to know how long Ralph had been contemplating me before he laughed. I scrambled up to a sitting posture, flattened down my skirts, and started to bait a fresh pin. I wouldn't have gone on in front of everybody, but Ralph never laughs at me. He's far too nice for a clergyman.

"I would have a dog that didn't bark at people when they came," he said, "wouldn't I, Foxy Bill?"—pulling that gentleman's ears:

"You are a fool, Bill!" I admitted more in sorrow

than in anger; and he did parabolic curves with his tail and grinned like a Cheshire cat, and did everything else he could think of to propitiate me.

"For goodness sake, don't!" I ordered. "The way he does fancy tricks with his spine is bad enough, making you imagine you've got a pet boa-constrictor instead of a dog, but when he draws back his lips and gives that toothy smile he makes my flesh creep. Did you ever see anything so insane, Ralph? If there was a home for weak-minded dogs I'd send Bill there."

"You are a bit of an idiot, aren't you, Bill?" Ralph said. Bill wagged his tail in enthusiastic agreement.

"Never mind," I said, putting an arm round his neck (Bill's neck, of course, not Ralph's), "I love him, weak mind and all. It's funny how you can love people just as much for their faults as for their virtues."

"Not a bit. It's hard to love virtuous people. It's much more human nature to hate them because they make you feel worse by comparison."

He lay on his back and chewed grass for awhile, and I went on fishing.

"Nothing to do this afternoon?" I inquired.

"No."

"Dolly not at home?"

"No."

Conversation languished, so I turned my attention again to the tea-fight. All at once Ralph said, "Peter!"

"Yes."

"You know you're a jolly sensible girl. I think a lot of your opinion."

"That's awfully nice of you, Ralph. Something you want to talk over?"

"Yes; I want your advice."

Another pause while I fished industriously. Then Ralph resumed in a voice so casual it positively bristled with significance.

"Peter, when a fellow is fond of a girl how on earth is he to know when he's far enough on to tell her so?"

"I'm not a complete edition of 'Hints to Young Bachelors,' Ralph," I pointed out. But he was too intent on saying his say to mind me laughing.

"There's a pal of mine," he resumed, "likes a girl rather, and he thinks she likes him too, but is not sure how much."

"There's one way of finding out," I suggested.

"Yes, but" (I felt like telling him he'd be ill if he ate much more grass) "he doesn't want to spoil things. You see, they're pretty good friends as it is, and that's better than nothing, and if he asked her and she wouldn't have him of course everything would be—well, she wouldn't like him round her the same, would she?"

"I suppose not."

"What would you advise him to do?"

"My dear Ralph, I wouldn't dream of advising him at all; it's none of my business."

"I suppose not." His voice sounded melancholy.

Really it's too ridiculous, that big tease lovesick. I melted.

"One feels rather awkward about butting in, in a matter like this, you know, Ralph; every man must just do what he thinks best. If he thinks it's too soon, he'd better not rush it; but if he's just ordinarily nervous of speaking—girls as a general rule like boldness even to the verge of impudence. There's a lot of truth in 'Faint heart' and other proverbs like that."

"Thanks!"

Ralph changed the conversation. Does he imagine for one minute he's bluffed me? Men are quaint.

I wish I could tell Dolly, but it wouldn't be playing the game.

CHAPTER XXVII

Glen's Perplexity

DI, I feel an intense sympathy for the man whose chief attribute seems to be that "he dunno where he are." I'd say to him, "Shake hands—same here." But I am so puzzled about Glen. I like him and detest him, and find him amusing and queerly shrewd and crudely young all at the same time, or at any rate the different feelings chase each other at such a speed that, like a cinematograph, they give the appearance of a continuous whole.

I can't make up my mind whether he's tired of me or is in love with me. It simply must be one or other, otherwise his conduct is inexplicable. Dick reckons he's in love with me; I almost think it too, but it sounds so conceited and stupid to say; and suppose I am wrong after all, and it's only nerves or liver complaint?

But even then I don't think any fellow would behave quite as disagreeably to a girl as he does to me, unless he was fond of her. If I didn't think that I'd give him my opinion of his manners in a way that would fairly make him sit up.

It can't be that he wants to make me quarrel with him so as to get out without dirtying his boots, because I gave him the chance, a real plain, obvious chance, and he wouldn't take it, and so, you see—it really does look as if he cared, doesn't it? Perhaps I sound daft, Di? but he is inexplicable now.

Goodness! but men are different when you know them

really—at least, Glen is. When he first meets a girl he's like caster sugar, sweet and mushy. I liked him so much, he was always subtly making a fuss of me, and hinting he adored me, and in the thousand and one little ways men use he made me look forward to his coming and feel sorry when he left. He kept coming up, and it must have been mainly because of me, since, though he had known the Danishes for a long time, he hadn't gone there except when especially invited.

Lately, as I told you, he has been always talking about love and arguing round it, and wondering why it bites us all. That didn't matter to him, he was only playing with the fire and its warmth amused him, but now I think he's burnt and it makes him resentful. I know he hates being in love with me, and I think that's what makes him so queer.

He's always making fun of love, these days, jeering at it as if he were defying himself and it, and now it makes me madly angry with him, and now it makes me awfully sorry. I think I'm always the sorrier when he's away; I can't help seeing it from his point of view, and it is rotten for him. Of course I would be telling an obvious lie if I pretended it didn't please me rather to think he likes me. A man's affection is a compliment that must exhilarate any girl. I wouldn't like him not to care, but, all the same, I could find it in my heart to wish he didn't. I suppose I don't love him if I feel like that, because they say love is always selfish. Ah! I've cause enough to know the truth of that.

You see, Di, the way I explain it to myself is this: Glen is only twenty-four; he's the youngest partner in a young firm; he couldn't get married for a long time yet, he hasn't money enough; his people are well off, but I couldn't bear to live on them; besides, even if we did agree to try and live on the smell of an oiled rag, a wife and family is a tremendous handicap for an ambitious young lawyer. And I hate long engagements, and so does he, because he asked me if I minded; and it's really

just as bad as an engagement if you have a private understanding—he asked me that too.

Then again, twenty-four is young to take your grab in the matrimonial bran-pie. He might meet someone else much nicer than me in a few years, and it's hardly fair to me, he thinks, to ask me to wait an indefinite time. One-tenth consideration for me, nine-tenths for himself.

That's the way, I've come to the conclusion, Glen argues. I wonder if I'm right. Perhaps he doesn't care twopence about me, after all.

I think he does, but he wishes we hadn't met for another four or five years. Of course an unsettled mind like that is apt to be wearing on the temper, for he can't make up his mind to let me go altogether. Sometimes he chases me out of his head and stops away for a fortnight or three weeks, and I never see or hear a sign of him, and then he suddenly turns up as if nothing had happened. I used to get angry at first, but now it amuses me rather. I wonder if it ever occurs to him to wonder how I like being played battledore and shuttlecock with. I don't think it would; it wouldn't interest him much anyway—nobody interests him except as they directly affect himself, he's tremendously self-centred. I wouldn't call him selfish exactly, because selfishness seems to imply a petty outlook and he has not that; his egotism is more of the Napoleonic-Bismarck style—he'd just brush anything out of his way that was no use to him. I suppose he must want me, or I should have gone by the board ages ago. Heigh-ho! that ought to be some consolation.

I believe he's always horrid now to prevent himself making love to me, but, even thinking that, it gets monotonous. Now and again he is nice for a while, just his old self (and he can be nice when he chooses), but it never lasts long. Dick says he's hooked, but I tell him to mind his own business and not be vulgar.

I had such a lovely dream about him last night; it sounds so stupid to tell you, Di, but I did like it. It started in a mad way like most dreams do. I was standing

with Trixie in Pirie Street, and he sailed up to me as cool as ice-cream and said, "Hallo!" I responded, "Hallo." He next inquired if I'd heard the cricket score. I replied, "No." He then said, "Let's walk home, will you?" So I said to Trixie, "You catch the next car, we're going to walk," and off we sailed as calmly as if it was my usual habit to be carrying a basket of vegetables in the main streets of Adelaide, and to leave my chaperon cooling her heels on the pavement at his bidding. But he always makes me do what he wants.

He carried a bag in one hand himself, but he kindly took my basket from me (the vegetables had quite naturally by this time disappeared). Then all of a sudden we were out at Mitcham, strolling down Lovers' Lane, and it was moonlight. It was idiotic enough up till then, but from that minute I felt just like I do ordinarily with him.

When I went to turn down our street he said in his abrupt way, "Don't go home yet, I want to say something to you."

"Well, why don't you say it?" I inquired as we went in beneath the chequered plane-trees.

"Don't feel like it now," he replied.

We walked on in silence for a bit.

"Oh!" I said, "do let me take my basket, it's awkward carrying one in each hand."

Somewhat to my surprise he gave it up to me without a protest, but I got a bigger shock still when all of a sudden I felt his arm round me. But I just couldn't say a word, and he didn't either. It was the loveliest, silliest kind of love-making you ever heard of, Di. We went on ages without saying anything; I felt absurdly happy and content, and he did too, I know, and I felt he was going to kiss me when we got to our gate; and just half a dozen yards away from it Dolly woke me up. If she had only left me just one second longer we would have reached the gate.

I wonder if I love him? If I don't, why did I feel so safe and happy when he drew me to him? When other

men have tried to at dances, I felt sick and frightened ; it brought back Rex—that funny look in the eyes.

Rex has not been near us for ages and ages. I think he has been out of Adelaide for some time. I am glad. I do not think I would ever be frightened with Glen. I wonder if he is a different sort of man from Rex, or is it only my surroundings and friends and position that ensure his respect ? If he had found me a nameless, unconventional little savage, as Rex did, would he have behaved like him ?

I wonder if all men are alike ? Surely my old Dick could never be rotten to any girl. But more and more I begin to realise it isn't their goodness keeps girls good, it's society, the weight and influence of opinion, that stops a man saying anything she should not hear to a girl of his own set, who could avenge the insult through her relations and friends. They are so protected and hedged round by conventionality, so safe by their assured position, the breath of lawless passion beats itself in vain on their social barriers ; they rarely even hear, much less feel it. But I—I begin to see a little now that I must have seemed fair game.

Girls are not allowed to face the raw truths of life, they are sheltered from them by the kindly tyranny of the home. I had no home, no barrier ; I was met, unwarned and unarmed, by the very whirlwind of passion—is it wonder I was withered in it ? It is not just to condemn me, it is not, indeed it is not. Lucy Rees, Dot Parks, Dolly herself, all these girls I go about with, play tennis with, meet and like, all these girls who are accounted good, and who, if they knew, would treat me like a leper—put them in my place, would they have been stronger than I ?

Peter, Peter ! you can never forget. I wonder if Glen would understand ?

CHAPTER XXVIII

Glen's People

RALPH and Dolly and Glen and I went down to Glenelg to-night. I'm simply aching to tell you, Di, it was the most squealable thing you ever heard of. To be precise, we didn't go down together, for Dolly and I went down in the afternoon for a swim, and we had arranged to meet the boys about half-past five and go to tea in the kiosk.

It was glorious in the water; that clearness you can see through to the very bottom, feet and feet of it just stirring slightly like a half-set jelly; and there were lots of girls there we knew, too, so we had a jolly time. It's comical how different they look in bathing-gowns, though; some of them are quite hard to recognise with their hair in wet tails round their cheeks and their lips half blue with chill. But looks don't matter when you're enjoying yourself. And everybody seems no age at all in the water. You can't tell the difference between a grown-up girl and a school-flapper; it's clothes that define age.

Then it's so pretty to see them sitting out on the spring-board in a petticoat, with bare feet, drying their hair, brushing it till it flies out electrically like a seaweed cloud around their faces, and the sun gets under it for a shade.

I think the sun must be so glad when the clouds shelter him a bit. It must be awful to be hot all the time.

We met the boys on the sea wall, and we started up the jetty. Of course Ralph and Dolly got behind, they always do, so equally of course Glen and I were ahead. All this is important to explain what happened, Di, so don't yawn. There were not many people on the jetty

then, most had gone home to tea, so you could see the few who were ages off.

The sea had gone clean off to sleep, only now and again a little shiver ran all over it, like animals do when they have had dreams. I wonder if the sea ever dreams, and what it dreams about? There was a very young wind who had forgotten the time, trying to get home before Æolus shut the cave up. And all of a sudden Glen said, "Good Lord!"

"What is it?" I said quickly.

He glanced at me in quizzical dismay. "My people!" And then I saw Freda with an old lady and gentleman. "Shall we turn and go back?" I suggested.

"Too late—they've seen us."

"Well——" I began.

"I suppose we'll have to stop and speak to them for a second—do you mind?—but I can hardly stalk past, and—I say," he said, "I'm awfully sorry."

I was sure he was, but I thought it would be rather comic myself, so I said it couldn't be helped. So we halted each other in an accidental sort of way (I could see Freda had meant to from the first), and Glen introduced me.

"Freda, you know Miss Delaney, don't you? This is my father, Miss Delaney, and my mother. I didn't know you were coming down to-night," he added lamely.

"We just decided on the spur of the minute to motor down for a breeze," Mamma said. She has a sharp voice and was muffled up in motor wraps, it was too dusky to make out her face. "It's so fresh down here, don't you think?"

"Very nice indeed," I said, feeling rather, under Freda's scrutiny, as if I'd been caught *in flagrante delicto*. "I am very fond of the Bay."

"You live here?"

"Oh, no; in town. I think the Bay is like chocolate, to be taken in moderate doses, otherwise you feel satiated."

"Dear me!" said Mamma politely.

I couldn't think of anything more to say nor could

anybody else for a second. You know that awful pause that comes in conversation when one topic is finished and no one has started another. Freda came to the rescue.

"We must be getting back to the motor, Mamma," she said easily. "Good-bye, Glen; good-bye, Miss Delaney." Her eyes snapped at us like the ends of two live wires in contact.

When we got up to the kiosk, Ralph and Dolly, who had viewed the scene from afar off, leaned over the railings and shrieked with laughter. Of course we laughed too, but I think Glen was a bit wild. Still, he was awfully nice.

I think Pa would be the best of them, he never said anything, but his eyes gave us such a jolly twinkle as if he liked to see people enjoying themselves. I wonder what they thought of me.

Anyway, we had a lovely time on the beach afterwards: And there's the party next Friday.

CHAPTER XXIX

Maidenhair

THE party was quite nice after all, and even the inspection wasn't so bad, though they all turned out in full force—Pa and Ma and Sissie. They weren't obtrusive about it, and I really liked Pa—he is undoubtedly a charming old gentleman; I guess it's from him Glen gets his pretty manners. I had to play cards with him part of the time. It was a euchre party, and, though I was feeling rather shy and uncomfortable, by the time we got up to go to the next table he had me laughing as if I had known him for years. I think he liked me too.

I'm not so sure about Mamma. She is stout, with piercing eyes; they tried to bore right through me, to see if the inside was as good quality as the outside. Sissie never got past the out, but she took that in with an eagle glance.

I was so glad I had a new frock. It's silver net over steel-blue glacé, and it makes me slim and curvy. Jack said I looked like a snake-charmer. Glen happened to be going past me at the minute, and he stopped and murmured so that I could just hear, "The last word is right."

"What of?" I mocked, though I was pleased.

He gave me that queer direct glance of his that always makes me drop my eyes and said in the same undertone, "Have a guess."

I got fearfully interested in the tassel of my girdle, and he moved on.

I didn't see very much of him, because, of course, he was playing host and had to be everywhere, but it was a nice feeling to know that, no matter where he was, if I were to raise my eyebrows just the least he would be

at my side in less time than it takes to write. It's delightful to feel a man hangs on the crook of your little finger, and for all his pride and queerness I believe Glen does care about me now.

Freda had a hard try to pump me ; she wants to know how far things have gone. I wonder if Glen's given her a hint at all. She insisted, when we were putting on our cloaks, on showing me her room and some Oriental rugs because I had, in the course of conversation, incautiously said that I admired them, and about every three minutes she'd drag in some remark about Glen. I stonewalled all I knew, and switched back desperately to rugs. The effect was something like this.

Freda : " Glen goes out a lot more now than he used, I believe. It used to worry us, he seemed inclined to be a perfect recluse a little while ago ; now I suppose you meet him at most places, don't you ? "

Me : " Yes, just about. Miss Morris, I think your rugs perfect."

Freda : " Rather decent, aren't they ? I think I'll come as something Eastern to your masked ball ; Glen's going to take me. It's rather nice, I find, to have a brother to trot round with ; he never would go anywhere with me once. I believe some of the credit of his reformation belongs to you."

Me : " Oh, I don't know about that. Did you ever see such a darling little joss ? Where did you get it ? "

Freda : " Colombo. You wouldn't believe how pleased Mamma and I are at the change in him, and Dolly told me our thanks are due to you."

Me (under my breath) : " Liar ! "

Freda : " We like the Danishes awfully, they're old friends of ours, and Dolly tells me you all see quite a lot of him."

Me (vaguely) : " Oh, yes ; I hope we shall see you too (this last a brilliant inspiration). Thank you so much for showing me the rugs, but I'm sure the others are waiting for me." (That girl's got impudent eyes.)

The two Dots were there, and didn't they measure lances! My word, I wouldn't be Jack for something; it's a wonder his hair doesn't go grey, balancing between them, though in a way it's all right for him just at present, he gets two lots of sugar instead of one. But there'll be trouble later on. The one with the black eyes has a temper.

Yes, if Jack doesn't make up his mind soon, there'll be trouble. Personally I put my money on Dot Lavington, so does Glen. But you never know, I wonder if either of them really care, or if it is just a feminine duel for the love of the battle. I hope it's the latter; it's rather pitiful if either minds. I believe Dot Parks does a little, that's why the other will win. It doesn't pay to care in this world.

Ralph's worried about something too. It's so unlike him to be glum, that just after supper, when we happened to be talking awhile a little apart from the others, I said: "What's the matter, Ralph?"

"Nothing, of course," he said, summoning up a smile. "Am I dull? I'm sorry."

"I don't want to pry into your affairs," I said, "but for the last few minutes you've been staring into the garden with a face as gloomy as if you'd received your death-warrant."

"It's not my death-warrant," he said, "it's another chap's. But it's no use worrying about it."

"Couldn't I help you?" I asked.

"I'm afraid not, unless you've £300 to give away."

"Goodness!" I gasped.

"It's a large order, isn't it? The same old story, embezzlement bit by bit. He's an old college pal of mine, and I'd give anything to save him. I know he'd run straight in future, but I don't see what I'm going to do about it. You can't ask many people to give a sum like that without security, especially to hush up a crime. People who've never been tempted are horribly hard on those who've gone wrong. Why, Peter!" he caught my hand, "little girl, don't take it like that. I wish I hadn't told you."

"It isn't that," I said, fighting a sudden rush of absurd tears, "never mind now. But, Ralph, I wish I could help—perhaps I could. I'll go and see father's bankers; he told me I could have more than my allowance if I wanted it. I don't know how much he's got. I could try."

"Oh, we couldn't take your father's money for a thing like that without his consent," Ralph objected, though there was a gleam of hope in his eye. "I'll try elsewhere first. Perhaps some of our old boys might club together; I'll try them."

That's all we had a chance to say, for we were swamped and swept apart in some new game they had started. Besides, Glen came and took possession of me—he said he was my partner. He lingered a minute as they all disappeared in laughing couples through the French windows, and then he said to me, abrupt as usual: "You don't want to go in, do you?"

"Not particularly," I answered, "but——"

"Come along and I'll show you the fern-house."

I hesitated a minute, and then our eyes met, and I laughed and gathered up my skirt; at least, you can't lift these tight ones much, but I didn't want it to scrape up all the gravel on the garden paths, so I tried till I saw Glen casting a surreptitious glance at my ankle, and I dropped it hastily. I don't really see why I should mind him looking at my ankles, because they are nicely turned, but it doesn't seem to be the thing when you've got a long skirt on to lift it high, though goodness knows, in the street, if the skirt is cut that way, you may wear it as short as you like. Isn't convention a funny, unreasonable thing?

"I devoutly hope," I said as we slipped down the lantern-lit path, "that no one will see us."

"Why?" He touched my arm to help me over a rut.

"Because——" He just looked at me.

The fern-house was lovely, ours is simply nothing in comparison to it; it's like they have in the Gardens—great walls of maidenhair fern, and big palms, and a

fountain with exquisite water-lilies in the centre and leaves that looked like young carpets, and those tropical leaf bulbs that grow on the wall ; the fern, self-sown, was like a little jungle even on the floor. Glen picked some sprays and held them against my head.

"Maidenhair," he said in a soft voice, and I felt stupid again and could only look at the floor. Then he insisted on fastening some just over my ear, and while he was doing it—and of course he had to bend quite close to me to get it in—enter sister Freda and a man !

Isn't that my luck all over, Di ? How we got out of that fernhouse I don't know. I wouldn't have minded anybody so much as Freda, her smile infuriates me.

I wish Ralph would hurry up and ask Dolly. Does it really take such a fearful lot of courage to propose ?

CHAPTER XXX

Dolly Asks Questions

ISN'T it exciting? Maria has hatched thirteen chickens out of thirteen eggs—she is a wonderful hen! I spent all this morning down in the fowl-yard. I do adore fowls, but I believe I've told you that before, Di. I wonder if they've got any brains at all, if they know they're fowls and not pigs? I wonder if they realise that a pig is different from a fowl? That's not an absurd remark, because knowing that a thing is not the same as yourself is not realising it; it is different. That sounds awfully subtle, but it's not.

Why I admire Maria is because she does what she's there for and does it well, she's not always busy scrapping with the next-door hen or flirting with Algernon (that's my pet rooster) through the wire-netting. She's there to hatch eggs and she hatches 'em. There's a lot in fulfilling your mission. It does seem quaint for a fowl to have a mission, doesn't it? Have I one? I suppose everybody has.

I mustn't forget to ask Jack to nail up that hole in the fence; the fowls have been getting into the cabbage-bed again, and Wilkins was mad. He told Pearl he'd screw their necks if he caught them. I think Wilkins is sweet on Pearl, he's always coming up to the kitchen to see the time or for something he's forgotten, and of which Pearl couldn't possibly know the present residence. I think she likes him, too, because she makes fun of him to me. Women are comic things, but they can't bluff each other. I like being one more every day.

I wonder how much a woman ought to like a man before

she marries him? I don't think all people who marry are desperately in love; they often are just used to each other and don't think they'd rub along better with anyone else. I wonder if——

Trixie started to talk to me about Glen to-day. She was very discreet, but it was horribly embarrassing. Dolly had a bout with me too. There's no discretion about her, she waded in head first. That metaphor is clumsy, but so is Dolly.

I had a headache and went to bed early, so my lady came and squatted on the foot to have a yarn when it got a bit better. Being in bed I couldn't escape, and my only method of suppression was to bury my head under the bedclothes, which was not half as satisfactory as suppressing her.

"Peter," was her graceful way of breaking the ice, "are you going to marry Glen?"

"Certainly not, unless he asks me," I replied.

"Don't side-step! Of course he will, sooner or later."

"That's not inevitable."

"What I want to know is, are you going to have him when he does?"

"Good Lord!" I began helplessly. Dolly stared down at me with marked disapproval.

"I suppose you are," she said, "but I won't congratulate you, so there! I think you're perfectly blind to take him when you could have——"

"Dolly, you're making my head worse," I protested.

"Humph!" Dolly's snort was a sheer triumph of disdain. "Funny it doesn't get worse talking of Glen. Heartless little cat."

"Dolly!" The tears came into my eyes, and she patted my forehead in swift remorse.

"There, never mind, never mind; of course you're not, Peter, only *such* a fool." She sighed over my idiocy and went.

But wasn't that a silly thing to say? Fancy asking a girl if she's going to marry a man before he wants her

to ! What could she answer but no ? Men do put girls in rotten positions. Sometimes I think I don't like being a girl at all.

I wonder if it would be fair to Maria to "set" her again ? She is so good-natured, and one always imposes on good nature. It doesn't pay to possess virtues in excess, does it ? But thirteen out of thirteen !—isn't she a trick ?

Di, do you suppose Glen really wants to marry me ?

CHAPTER XXXI

Peter Engaged

DI, it happened just like I dreamt it, or at least much the same way. Of course I ought to be in bed, but I must tell you first. You see, the masked ball was to-night—at least, I mean last night, because it's to-morrow morning by now—— How mixed I'm getting, but you can see what I mean.

Three guesses, Di: I always tell you the end at the beginning, don't I? But Glen and I are engaged. There!

I haven't told Dolly yet. He's coming round to-morrow morning to tell Trixie and Dr. Danish—I mean to-day morning, of course—but I suppose we'll have to write and ask father before we can announce it.

What do you think of it, Di? I wonder if I have done right? But I do like him, I really do awfully; I don't think I can ever like anyone more, and he is so clever he would never be dull. Of course he doesn't make me feel like Rex used, but that is perhaps because I was so much younger and not used to men; and besides, a feeling that can bring such disaster cannot surely be good. I know he will be very good to me, and Trixie and the Doctor will be pleased, and it is nice to be loved. Besides, I liked it when he kissed me. I think I must love him, but it's a different sort of love. And Lucy Rees told me when you are engaged you get fonder of each other than before. And I must be fond of him if I could be jealous of Dolly.

The ball was such fun. I went as Peter Piper after all. Dolly said she didn't see why I shouldn't, but it was perfectly awful buying the clothes. We had to go into the

men's department, and the assistants stared so at Dolly and me, I know they thought I was buying clothes for my husband, the way they grinned, and when I told the man to enter them he said inquiringly, "Mrs.—?" "Miss Delaney," I said, and positively fled before the amusement in his eyes.

Ugh! I wouldn't go through it again for something; but when I was dressed I was rather pleased with myself. Dolly was loud in her admiration. Trixie was a wee bit scandalised, I think. She said, "Peter, did you really go about dressed like that?"

"Rather!" I said; and all of a sudden I longed to be on Nugget's back, eating up the miles in a race towards the sun, to be in at the death, instead of going to a stupid dance. I rubbed a tentative hand down my moleskins and wondered if Fran would yell in a minute for me to go and help him polish the saddles. Trixie's voice brought me back to earth.

"How perfectly awful!" she said with conviction. "Jim ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Oh!" I said blankly, glancing down at my leggings. "Hadn't I better wear them?"

"I should say so," Dolly broke in. "You look a real trick, Peter, and, honestly, no one will know you with a mask on—you look a boy out and out. Oh, Peter, dance with me, dance with girls all night. Keep it up, it'll be a huge joke. Do, Peter," she urged as I looked doubtful, so finally I said I would.

And I did. It was fun. I heard lots of guessing as to who I was, and, my! the amount I learnt about the girls of my acquaintance that night, and some I thought were as proper as proper. It was my fault, I dare say, but once or twice in the evening I thought it was lucky I'd arranged to put on a dress before unmasking, or I shouldn't have a girl friend left in Adelaide. But I'm bothered if I'd let a strange man kiss me.

Glen knew who I was, of course; he was dressed as a lawyer in wig and gown. Rex was a stockman like me:

He looked very handsome, I cannot deny, but sort of unhappy ; he kept staring very hard at the Pierrettes and Butterflies and Dutch girls, but of course he never dreamed of looking for me among the men.

Glen insisted on booking dances with me, but I refused point-blank to dance with him and spoil Dolly's joke. We (Dolly and I) went and sat behind a trellis where everyone had a good view of us, and *spooned*—we did—we positively *ladled* ! Dolly begged me to ; she said she wanted to give people something to talk about and get their attention off Ralph.

So I compromised with Glen by “smoking them out” together like men sometimes do, and every time we thought how we were bluffing people we laughed till our cheeks ached. After supper we found we had two that came together, so we strolled down to our old lily-pond as usual. As we went between the willows my hat got knocked off and the branches caught in my wig.

“My precious wig !” I cried. “Save my appearance ; I've got a partner for the next dance, and she will perform if I don't turn up.”

So Glen came and tried to disentangle me, and I don't know whether it was the moon, or the willows, or me, or what did it, but as he bent over me he kissed my neck and said, “Peter !” just like that ; and then before I knew what happened next I was burying my nose in his shirt-front. It was all very Glennish.

And then you see we got engaged. That's all.

Except one thing.

I wish it hadn't happened. It makes me feel all upset inside, and it takes all the sweetness out of being engaged. Oh, Rex is selfish ! he needn't have spoilt my first evening, though of course he couldn't tell, and I do wish he'd go right away to Melbourne, or England, or Timbuctoo.

I was going up to change my clothes, for it was twenty to twelve, and I slipped out on to the terrace to breathe a second in the quiet. The big ivy-grown pillars always give me such a feeling of rest and strength. I could look

away out over the plain to Brighton and Glenelg ; the sea beyond was like a big moonstone changing colour under her light. Then I noticed a figure hunched up in a dark corner. It was a man, and he had his head buried in his arms. I wondered what he was miserable about ; I thought perhaps his best girl had slipped him up. All of a sudden he raised his head, and it was Rex !

I tried to run away, but I seemed glued tight, and he sprang up and came towards me slowly as if I were a dream and he were afraid of waking up. Once he rubbed his eyes.

"Peter !" he said in an awed sort of voice ; "my Peter ! and I was just thinking of you—like that."

I said nothing.

"Is it a miracle ?" he said, still in that hushed tone. "Are we back at Magnet," his glance travelled from my blue shirt down to my leggings and back again, "or am I still just dreaming of you, Peter ?"

I don't know why just his voice hurts something inside me and makes me want to make him wince.

"Neither," I retorted ; "it's a fancy dress ball, and"—I faced him defiantly—"Glen wanted me to wear it."

"Glen !" The word shot out like a bullet.

I nodded and went to move away. He barred me with one arm.

"Don't go, Peter," he pleaded, "for just one minute. Stand there, and say nothing if it pleases you, for just one little minute ; it's such a small thing to you and so much to me. God !" (his face twisted in such a queer smile), "I wonder if women know how cruel they are ? Don't you realise, Peter, you've had your revenge twenty times over in what you've made me suffer since you came here—twenty times, Peter, and more ?"

I stared at him and then turned quickly to the sea. It was winking in big circles of light just like a moonstone when the rays strike it. He came close to me. I wished he wasn't so big and overpowering ; his presence stifles me—it always did.

He simply ate up my face with his eyes for a second, then he flung back his head and laughed recklessly.

"I know you hate me," he said, "you'll never let me come near you; you think me lower than the dirt beneath your feet, but at least you trample on it more lightly than you do on me. Don't you know your power, Peter, or can I never suffer enough for you? If you knew what a hell of jealousy is in me when I see you with other fellows, and you won't let me so much as brush the hem of your skirt. Peter, don't go. I know I'm mad to talk to you like this, but it's"—his hand went unsteadily to his throat—"it's seeing you dressed like that, and—and knowing you're as far away from me now as the stars. Peter! it's you make me mad. Before God, I loved you, Peter, I did." His hand gripped the rail tightly. "I'm a fool to ask what's impossible, but, Peter" (the yearning in his voice hurt me), "is it dead, past reviving? Couldn't I ever make you care again?"

Why does he still hurt me like that? Can hatred ache the same way as love?

"I am engaged to Glen," I said.

For one minute his eyes looked naked misery at me, then he forced his face to a smiling mask. "I hope," he said, "you will be very happy."

Of course I am, but I wish I didn't feel so ridiculously miserable too, only I do hate hurting anything, even him.

Di, I wonder if—ought I to tell Glen about—Rex?

CHAPTER XXXII

Glen as a Lover

It's very delightful, being engaged, I enjoy it so much. We have not put it in the papers, since father has not had time to hear from us, but Glen told his people, and a few of our greatest friends have been let into the secret, so I suppose all Adelaide knows by now.

I got my ring yesterday ; it is a perfect beauty, emeralds and diamonds set in such an uncommon pattern. I keep holding out my finger and admiring it when I'm by myself. Glen kissed my finger before he put it on. I can't get over the extraordinariness of him doing things like other men. I get a fresh shock every time, it seems undignified or something for him to give way in such a manner. I suppose in spite of his cynical exterior he's as sentimental as the next man ; but I can't help being startled for a bit. I'll get used to it in time.

And I do like to feel there's someone cares awfully if your head hurts, or to scold you if you go out in the night air without a coat (me ! that's often and often slept out under the stars in my clothes) or get over-tired at tennis. He fidgets after me like an old grandfather.

There's lots of points about an engagement. But, oh, heavens ! the first dinner party with the family ! Of course they asked us all up the minute they heard. Sugar was no name for Mamma and Sissie, I felt like those who surfeit with too much. Peter, you rude little animal, they were tremendously kind and you ought to be real grateful at the hearty way they welcomed you into the family. I was too, but I do not like Freda, and I don't think I ever shall. Thank goodness ! there's only one of

her, as Dolly pointed out—she might have been twins or triplets. But if Glen felt as big a fool as I did I'm sorry for him ; I think he did, too.

He gets nicer every day ; he's never prickly now, though he sometimes has laughing fits at the come-down of being in love. But I do wish Dolly was more cordial about it ; you can't pick any flaw in her manner, but I know she doesn't like it, and it makes me uncomfortable when she's with us.

Still, everybody else is pleased. All the girls rave over my ring, and they want to know how he makes love. Lucy says they simply can't imagine Glen calling me "Popsy-wop." Neither he does, the great sillies—the nearest he ever gets to a pet name is "Butterfly" (he calls me that when he gets a bad spasm). Dot Parks has offered to make me a big supper-cloth of drawn threadwork. Isn't it kind of her ? because we're not great friends and she does them beautifully. She's looking so white and unhappy lately. I think Jack's an—an animal. Still, I suppose it's rough on him, too, if a man can't like a girl without everybody concluding at once he wants to marry her. All the same, he oughtn't to "like" her quite so strenuously as he used Dot Parks.

Everything nice comes in a lump. Ralph has got over his worry too—not his worry about Dolly, for she does lead him a dance, but the other one about the money. He came and told me as jubilant as a sandboy. I did think it kind of him to tell me at once, for I was feeling quite unhappy myself about his poor pal, although I don't even know his name, but Ralph has a trick of enlisting your sympathy for people.

He wouldn't tell me who gave him the money, but he was simply full of his praises ; he reckons he's the finest white man he's ever met. "You know, Peter," he confided to me later, "he hadn't got the money in hand ; the beggar actually went out and raised it for me. Wasn't it fine of him ?"

It was awfully quixotic and silly, from a worldly point

of view, but I suppose it was fine. I wish he'd tell me who it was.

Di, ought I to tell Glen about Rex? Oh dear! I wish I had a mother to ask. I want to do the right thing, but how could I do that? Must I? It keeps coming up into my mind, and I try to stifle it, but I can't. But I couldn't—I just couldn't. When Glen's here I forget about it, but when I'm alone it beats like a little hammer at the back of my brain: "Tell him! Tell him!"

Di, must I?

I didn't think so much about it till last night. We were talking by the lily-pond (aren't you sick of hearing about that place, Di? you'd think our residence consisted of it and the drawing-room), and I can't remember exactly what we were talking about or how the conversation led up to it. I think we were talking about a girl friend of Dolly's who is marrying an absolute rotter—even the boys say she's mad—and Glen said to me abruptly:

"Peter, I'd like you to know I'm " (of course it was dark—things sound more natural in the dark) "decent as far as women and things are concerned. I never quite knew why I kept out of it all before, unless it's a sort of fastidiousness, but I know it was so that I could face a girl like you without any regrets. I'm glad I can, Peter."

I had to put my hand in his and say "Thank you, Glen." but, oh, Di! can't you guess what it was like to listen to that? I must tell him, but not yet; let me wait just a few days longer. I've had so little happiness, so very little.

Will he be hard, or will he understand?

I find people are hard on the woman.

Di, I *can't* tell him!

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Square Thing

I must tell Glen; there's no help for it, it's the only square thing to do. I must. But how can I? Oh, Di, Di! did ever a girl before have such a thing to do? How can I tell him, how make him believe a thing like that about—me! The girl he's engaged to? I can't. Why need I tell him? He might never know, and—— No, I won't lie. If he marries me it must be me, and not an imaginary woman.

But perhaps he never will marry me if I tell him. Surely he would forgive me; he's a Christian, and Christ said that even He *did* not condemn a woman like me, and told her to make a fresh start. It doesn't seem fair, it doesn't indeed, that a woman can never retrieve a mistake like that. But to tell him—I don't know how! How can I put it? How can I bear to see his teasing smile change to amazement, unbelief, horror, perhaps hatred? No, no, no! I can't, I can't! It's too much to ask—I can't bear it.

Why didn't someone tell me the only thing that matters to a girl is her good name? How can I bear to tear away from myself the veil of respect through which Glen views me? How can I say it? If only I needn't do it myself; if someone else could tell him for me; but to tear down my shrine with my own hands!

And the only words that are racing through and through my brain like electric flashes are "I cannot" and "I must." I find myself saying them mechanically, but it is the last I must say oftener—I must, I *must*!

But, oh, Peter, it'll take all the pluck you've got!

CHAPTER XXXIV

It Is Done

It's done.

Heaven knows how I did it, but I did. All day I felt like death, and Dolly said at dinner I looked like it. I met Glen in the garden—I couldn't bear to greet him in front of others that night—and we turned and went down the garden path between the high hedges of pittesporum. Its scent turned me sick!

"Peter," Glen said, "what's the matter? You're as white as a ghost?"

I couldn't bear any more, I slipped out of his arm. "Don't," I said.

"Don't what?"

"Don't touch me."

"Peter!" There was a hint of anger in his voice, and he endeavoured to draw me to him again.

"Please!" I struggled. "There's something I must tell you first. You mayn't want to then."

"Butterfly, what is the matter?" This time he would not be denied, and I hid my face against his shoulder with a sudden rush of comfort.

He smoothed my hair. "Butterfly!" he said again in his sweetest way; and, oh! it hurt more than ever to think of what I had to say next.

I pushed him away suddenly, and dragging off my ring I thrust it into his hands. "Take it, take it!" I said. "No, Glen, wait, I must tell you something first."

We had somehow reached the lily-pond by now, and I looked at it with a quick tightening in my throat. It was here Glen had said he loved me, here I had spent

so many happy hours, and now here—— I was glad the willow shaded my face.

Then I told him. It all came tumbling out somehow ; I don't know what I said, but I made him understand. And, oh ! the sight of his face was punishment enough. I finished and stood silent before him.

"It's not true !" he burst out violently. "Peter, it can't be—you're—great God !" and then a faint little hope that had struggled to live, even before the anguish in his face, died, and I felt numb and quiet.

"Rex !" he said again, and there was murder in his eyes and clenched fists.

I still stood with my hands clasped, looking at the lily-pond.

"And my white butterfly—oh, Peter !"

"Don't," I said in a small voice, but I couldn't cry.

He stood staring at the black water with a face as black as it, and there was a silence so keen that it hurt. All of a sudden he laughed recklessly and, turning, caught me in his arms.

"When shall we be married, Peter ?" he said.

I lifted my face slowly and gazed full at him. I saw written in his eyes and the curl of his mouth, pride, misery, pity, but—no love.

I did not answer, but when he, in turn, too saw my face he slowly released me, and with a sudden gesture of abandonment he laid his arm along a bough and hid his face on it.

Again the awful silence.

"Why not, Peter ?" He had his back to me.

"You know why."

He turned with quick passion. "I don't care—I love you."

I clasped my hands tighter. "You do not respect me."

"No," the monosyllable seemed forced from him.

I did not answer. He scanned my face for a few tense seconds and stretched out his arms. I shut my eyes.

Then with a sound between a sob and a curse he lifted his right arm and sent my ring wheeling over to the pond. I caught the flash of its diamonds twice in the starlight before it fell.

I heard his footsteps dying away, and I still stood there, I could not even faint.

CHAPTER XXXV

Not Good Enough

IF there were only oneself and one other in the world things wouldn't be so complicated, but when we've both got relations and friends! If that night by the lily-pond hadn't deadened my power to feel, their pinpricks would hurt.

Dolly and Trixie are furious with Glen, and Glen's people are furious with me. If only people hadn't known we were engaged there wouldn't have been any talk. It's my fault and not his, and I wish Dolly wouldn't say such horrid things of him, but I can't tell her about it, so I can't stop her. I think she and Trixie are a little hurt because I won't take them into my confidence. I am sorry for that.

They both think Glen jilted me, but everybody else believes I treated him badly. He told his people I had broken off the engagement, and they have spread it round, plus their opinion that I am a shameless, heartless flirt. It is enough to make me smile, only I don't often smile now. Glen has gone to Sydney. It was very nice of him to say I had done it.

Dolly talked to me to-day; she came and perched on my window-sill with a book of ethics, and read me scraps in between chocolates.

"Peter, are you suffering about Glen?"

"No, Dolly," I answered, and I think I spoke truth; I do not feel enough to suffer now. I do not feel any wild pain or emotion or anything. Perhaps I will later, but I don't feel at all. My mind seems like a room that has had a spring cleaning—all the curtains are down, and

the carpets are up, and the furniture bundled outside; there's nothing but four blank walls enclosing nothing. I seem in someone else's room, it's not like mine.

Dolly heaved a sigh of relief and yet gazed at me doubtfully. "You—you've got so queer, though," she said; "you seem as if you'd been canned and left in the freezing chamber overnight by mistake. You used to be so jolly, and now no one ever gets a smile out of you. One might as well live with a funeral."

I looked at her distressedly. It never occurred to me before, I am selfish to give way. I always try to talk when we are together, but I know I do escape whenever I can.

"Don't be a fool!" Dolly snapped when I stammered out something of my thought. "You're as sweet as a new bride returning calls, if you want to know, and that's precisely what is worrying us. 'Tisn't like you to be sweet and squashy. If I could only do something, Peter—I'd like to scrag Glen."

"But, Dolly, I'm not worrying about Glen," I protested. "I was fond of him, or I wouldn't have become engaged; but I—I—Dolly dear, I wish I could explain to you, but I can't. I couldn't marry him now, but it's not that exactly that makes me feel bad, it's—really, old girl, I'll be all right soon. And it is selfish of me to mope, I'll try to behave better."

"You idiotic angel," Dolly said with a wet sniff, "all the same, wait till I get at Glen!"

"Poor boy!" I smiled almost naturally. I think I am sorrier for Glen than myself now. He must be suffering; it hurts me to think how badly I have hurt him. I know he would sooner I had died, for then he could still have loved my memory, but when you kill respect you kill love, I know that. He is only a boy, he will soon get over the infatuation that remains, and I'm woman enough still to be a bit sorry for that.

"Anyway," Dolly said sympathetically, "I'm glad it's smashed. I never liked it. Glen's a nice boy, I suppose,

but he's not nearly good enough for you, and by and by you'll think so too."

How delightfully ironic! Not good enough for me, and he thinks I'm not good enough for him. That is the real hurt that I cannot tell Dolly, and that nothing and no one can heal—that Peter Piper is not fit for a decent man. Am I as low as all that? That thought is the little snake that lives in my bosom and feeds on my heart. Not fit—oh, how it hurts!

Not fit to be a man's wife, not fit to bear his children—to feel tiny helpless hands at my breast—Peter, Peter!—I could have loved them so.

There, I feel better, but that is the first time I have cried since.

Dick was the hardest. To say he roared and rampaged is to put it mildly. He wanted to start straight for Sydney with a gun. Oh dear! I wish they wouldn't all say such hard things about Glen. It makes me feel a miserable hypocrite, but I can't defend him.

I wonder if Dick would still love me if he knew? He is going to Kalgoorlie in a few weeks; I wish he were not, I feel so lost, although my own mother couldn't be gentler to me than Trixie is.

Sometimes I wonder—I hope father hasn't got consumption. Ought I to go to him? After all, he's my father. I think I'll write and ask him if he'd like me to go back to prison, Peter, eh? But all the world's a prison for me.

Dr. Danish was saying something about a fuss in Rex's office. I meant to ask him more about it, but I forgot. I hope it's not my fault, but Glen is very bitter when he is roused. Rex has only been here once since the break. I barely spoke to him, not on purpose, it just happened; he watched me a lot, and his face looked sorry, but not offensively so.

I wonder if he guesses?

CHAPTER XXXVI

Glen's Revenge

It came like a bolt from the blue. They have turned Rex out of the partnership; the courts have dissolved the firm of Morris, Ware and Harris, or something like that. I don't understand it, but I heard Dr. Danish telling them at home this morning. He is very indignant about it, and says Rex has been badly treated.

He came up to-night. I did not know; I was in the little summer-house down at the end of the garden when I heard voices. I stayed where I was, since I thought they would soon pass on, and I didn't want to meet Rex—I had recognised his voice. Then I heard Dolly's. They stopped right in front of the entrance, but they could not see me, I had a dark frock on.

"It can't be as bad as all that, Rex, surely?" I heard Dolly say.

"Yes, it is," he replied gloomily.

"Oh, I am sorry," she said; "I'm awfully sorry, old man."

Dolly's empty little face seemed quite concerned.

"Thanks," he said, giving the hand she put in his a little squeeze; "you always were a sport, Dolly."

"Then are you ruined?" she said.

I suppose I should have gone away but I couldn't let them know at that stage. I put my hand over my ears, but even then I couldn't help hearing.

At Dolly's horrified question he roused himself with a half-laugh. "Not quite as bad as that. As far as money goes I'm about where I started, though even from a practical

point of view it's rather a bad outlook. You see, we've been partners for five years now, and we're just beginning to make our name. I can't help using the 'we' still," he said, with a bitter smile; "we've worked up a connection and are looked upon as a promising firm; and just as our feet are firmly fixed on the ladder of success they kick me off like a worn-out shoe. I've worked as hard as either of them, and I've sacrificed everything to my career, more than most people know, but that's the particular sweetness of the pill. I might as well have saved myself the trouble. It means I've got to commence the struggle all over again on my own hook—start now on my own where I started five years ago, with all that time wasted."

"Oh, not wasted," Dolly objected. "Think of the practice you've had."

"And the reputation I've acquired," he broke in savagely. "Can't you see the beauty of the situation? I'm in the wrong from the world's standpoint. I've contracted reckless private debts; well, a firm does not want that sort of member in it. I'm a menace to its financial credit, I'll be getting into debt in the firm's name next—oh! they're within their legal rights to kick me out, the cunning devils."

"But what has happened exactly?" said Dolly.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand it," he answered.

"Well, you are polite." Dolly was downright indignant. "Me, a budding philosopher and a golf champion, and you dare to relegate my brains to the dim ages when——"

"I didn't mean to vex you, Doll," he apologised, "but it's rather a technical point, you see. Roughly, the case is something like this. I had to have a few hundred pounds in a hurry for something or other——"

"Betting again, Rex!" Dolly wagged an accusing head at him, and I could have shaken her, for in a flash it dawned on me who Ralph's "splendid man" had been. But Rex let her accusation stand.

"I borrowed it on the strength of the profits we expected from our last settlement. Glen and Harris delayed the accounts; I couldn't get the cash. Mind, I had no inkling at the time that it was more than accident; I offered him bigger interest, tried to borrow it from my partners." He laughed. "Of course they were working hand and glove together. The upshot was, before I realised it, he had got a charging order from the court on my share of the business, and—well, you see, they can kick me out for that."

"I call it a shame!" Dolly declared viciously, "and if I ever meet them again I'll cut them dead."

"What hurts most of all," he said slowly, "is that—hang it all, I've always played square myself, and when fellows you've known and trusted for years turn on you it kills your faith in humanity a bit. I—I was pretty fond of Glen, and I thought he liked me too. But he's weak, he's let Harris talk him over. I know he'd never have thought of it himself."

And I caught my breath back sharply, for all of a sudden it dawned on me that this was Glen's revenge. And I felt touched and resentful at the same time, for I knew, although he didn't, that it was not me he was vindicating, but he was punishing Rex for having spoilt for him a thing he wanted.

"It hurts one's pride," he said with an attempt at a laugh that wasn't a huge success. "Why, I'm a laughing-stock," he went on savagely, "a poor, deluded, half-witted fool, who oughtn't to be trusted out alone; a pretty sort of lawyer who can't look after his own interests; it's a good advertisement for clients. I—I wouldn't have minded Harris if Glen had stuck to me," he added.

"Dolly!" came a cry from the house.

"Yes."

"Ralph's here."

"Let him wait," Dolly returned clearly. Then she turned to Rex. "I'm awfully sorry, old boy," she said, "truly, sorrier than I can say; but cheer up, perhaps if they are such untrustworthy pigs it's better to find it

out now than later on, and you know if ever I can help you any way you won't have to ask twice. Please believe everybody hasn't turned against you."

I never would have believed Dolly could have been so sincere; there was quite an air of dignity about her white figure silhouetted against the dusking trees.

"Thank you, Dolly!" Rex said, as he took her outstretched hand.

She snatched it away with one of her inane giggles. "If Ralph sees me hanging tenderly on to your hand like this in the twilight there will be the dickens to pay. I must fly now—would you sooner stay here?"

He nodded.

"Well, come up, and I'll sing to you when you feel better."

For a long while he sat staring straight in front of him, pulling absently at Foxy Bill's ears, and I knew by his expression that if he had been a woman he would have been crying. At first I thought I was glad he was learning what it was to suffer too, but somehow I was only sorry for him—not even angry, only tremendously sorry.

"Well, Bill, old man," he said at last, "we've been taken down a peg or two and taught our place in the world, haven't we? If it hadn't been for Glen!" he muttered; and then he looked up and saw me standing between the lilac-bushes. He got up, and for a minute we stared at each other in silence.

"You!" he said.

Isn't it funny how in moments of tremendous excitements we say the most obvious things?

"Have you come to gloat over me?" he demanded savagely; "then gaze away. I'm ruined, betrayed, disgraced, does it comfort you at all?"

And then I knew that I had never hated him. He stood there facing me like an enemy, but I saw his lip give a tiny quiver and I didn't feel awkward any more.

"Please," I said, "I'm very, very sorry."

"Sorry!" His voice cracked on a note of surprise.

"Very sorry," I said gravely. "Please believe me."

He stared at me for a minute as if he couldn't, and then he went slowly red, a deep, distressed, painful red, it hurt me to look at him.

"Don't take it like that," I said, "don't!"—for all of a sudden he flung himself down on the seat and cried. I'd never seen a man cry before. I felt with every sob as if someone was stabbing me; it was horrible to look at. Di, if you could only have seen the tears forcing themselves through his fingers. I wanted to take his big, unhappy head on my heart and comfort him like a mother does her baby—we are all mothers by instinct when trouble comes—but I couldn't; of course, you see I couldn't.

So I waited till the tears stopped, and I saw his face was raised again looking at the beds of delphinium:

"How you ought to hate me!" he said:

"I do not hate you," I said slowly.

He turned an incredulous face to me. "You—what?"

I hesitated a moment; his blue eyes were fixed on mine as if he were trying to read my soul, and the pain in my chest made me feel sick.

Then he turned away. "You should," he said.

The shadows were getting blacker now, perhaps that was what gave me sudden courage. I went a step closer.

"Rex," I said (it was the first time I had spoken his name since—it sounded queer), "let us bury the past. I loved you and was ignorant, and you were passionate and weak, shipwreck was bound to come. I know you would give much to undo it all, and," I laughed a little drearily, "so would I. But it's no use, so forget all about it. It's not your fault that it is the woman who has to pay."

"Peter," he said, "was Glen part of the price?"

I hesitated a moment, then I nodded.

"My God!" he groaned and hid his face.

"Don't fret now," I said. "Indeed I am not unhappy. Glen"—(I stopped to choose my words)—"showed me

that sort of thing is over for me, but there—there are other things in life besides love.”

“My God!” he groaned again, “and you were made for love.”

There was a long silence, it was quite dark now. I held out my hand. “Good-bye, Rex,” I said.

He shook his head. “I am not fit to touch you.” Then all of a sudden he strode up to me, big and white and dominant.

“Peter,” he said, “I never knew what purity and goodness in a woman meant before, for there is a purity of soul that is above all others. From the bottom of my heart I respect and reverence you. If I could only pay for my cursed folly instead of you, with the blood of my heart I would atone. Peter!” he cried with anguish in his voice, “if I could pay I would. You believe me, don’t you?”

“I believe you,” I said.

And we both shivered as the harsh wail of a mopoke cut through the gloom.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Bad News

"ONE woe doth tread upon another's heels, so fast they come." That keeps ringing in my head. Perhaps it looks bad to be able to quote Shakespeare after hearing of your father's death, but I can't help it, it's the truth. Besides, it seems so unreal; he has been just a memory for so long, a name miles and hundreds of miles away, that to say he is dead doesn't seem to remove him any farther from me. And, too, it's no use pretending I am hurt, because I never liked him—he wouldn't let me; he never spoke to me hardly, except to swear at me, and if he hadn't brought me up like that, so far away from other women, Glen might still have wanted to marry me.

Not that that matters now, nothing matters now. Fran was right. Oh! I'm not peevish or miserable or anything, Di; I feel sort of numb, as if I couldn't realise things. Perhaps you do get to a point of suffering when you don't recognise it as pain.

I had a letter from his lawyers to-day; it was rather a shock in a way, for, except for Dick's reference to his cough, I had no notion he was ill, he wouldn't let me be told:

Poor father! it must have been lonesome, dying up there with no one to care but Fran. They say he caught a chill and never recovered; he developed consumption, and just went out like a candle.

He has left a lot of money, it seems; but why on earth, if he was well off, did he live in such an unearthly hole? It is all too puzzling. He has left everything he owned to me, and a big envelope addressed "To my daughter

Peter." Perhaps this will explain everything, though it would be just like father to have left me ignorant all my life.

I don't like to open it. Now I may be close to an explanation, I'm not sure that I want to know. Perhaps I may wish I didn't. Still I suppose, if it's his dying message to me, I'll have to read it, but I've got a presentiment I'll be sorry. Well, it serves me right; all along I've always wanted to know, and, anyway, nothing can hurt me any farther.

Trixie is terribly upset about it. She cried like anything when I told her father was dead, but she made me promise not to tell Dr. Danish, and when I showed her the envelope she was more distressed than ever. And that's worrying me too. What has Trixie to do with father and me?

"Peter," she said, "must you read it?"

"Of course I must," I answered.

"I suppose so," she agreed mournfully. She dabbed at her eyes, and suddenly she came and put her arms round me and her wet cheeks against mine.

"Peter, darling," she pleaded, "you won't let anything he says make any difference to you, will you? You'll love me if he says—if he—you won't turn against me, will you, Peter?"

When I think of Trixie I want less than ever to open this envelope. There it lies, an innocent-looking long envelope, and who knows what sort of dynamite it carries inside it? If I were to pop it on the fire without opening it—— But that wouldn't be fair to father.

Now it's done; just a sheaf of crumply sheets pinned together. A lot of it's in pencil, too; it won't be nice to read. I'll just pull the curtains first; it looks a cold, black night outside. Black has a tremendous amount of atmosphere about it; some blacks are quite warm. Even the electric light has a chilly effect. I shall sit in my big arm-chair, and you, Foxy Bill, may sit beside if you are quiet.

Now, father!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Delaney's Last Letter

TO MY DAUGHTER PETER,—

I'm dying. The doctor says so, but I know it anyway ; there's something in a man warns him when it's the finish. I'm glad it's over ; life's not meant much to me—perhaps it's my own fault.

As I lie here I've been thinking I ought to tell you about yourself. I've played with the thought backwards and forwards in my mind. The truth may be painful to you, but I can't see clearly ; I've no right to judge for you nor to keep you in ignorance. God, if there is one, forgive me my mistakes, and help you to the best you can make of your life.

I see now I haven't treated you fairly. It was no life for a girl. I should have sent you away years before ; that lawyer fellow showed me that, but I was afraid of what they'd make of you. No, here your very ignorance kept you innocent, and, though you mayn't believe it, in a twisted sort of way I loved you, though I hated you too when you reminded me of her. But you know that.

I was wrong, I can see it now. Ignorance is no safeguard, and after the lawyer chap went I was afraid—but that's over now, and you say you're engaged to be married to a decent man, so I can die in comparative peace, though it's no thanks to me. Make him a good wife, Peter, and keep his faith in women strong. Thank God you won through all right.

When a man loses his belief in women, or anyway in the one woman, it knocks the bottom out of his life. You

must have often wondered why I drag out existence up here. That's what happened to me, and I'd no heart left to face the world with. All I wanted was to see nobody. It stings still to open the old wound, so I'll give you the facts as briefly as I can.

From a boy I loved a girl, Trixie Manners ; she was the—I can't tell you what she was like, she was just Trixie to me and always will be. I loved her then, I love her still, though I've tried to pretend to myself all these years I hated her. But real love can never hate, I've found that out. It's only wounded vanity and smarting self-esteem that turn to rancour. Tell Trixie my last thought is of her ; I think you know now who she is. She is my sweetheart, my dear—and your mother.

She cared for me, too, in a girl's light way, but I was shy and reserved, and there was nothing definite between us. While I was away they married her to a rich brute called Denton. She was only eighteen, and miserable ; I wasn't much older, and a romantic, chivalrous dreamer, and I had always worshipped her.

He was a beast to her, Peter, a beast, remember that. Once he knocked her down. It was after that we ran away. I had great notions of honour and purity, and from the day I met her as Mrs. Denton I had never spoken a word of love to her. But she knew, and I was a chivalrous boy. But when I found her crying, with a bruise on her temple, I became a man and I took her away.

We came up here. I bought this house from a man who had built it for his bride, but she died three months after. It was a pretty place then, and Trixie made it a paradise. We were foolishly happy, and we were very young. We were terribly ashamed of ourselves, but so happy. And then you were born. Whenever I've looked at you since, Peter, I could see her sitting outside holding you in her arms in the evening and singing softly. She had a beautiful voice. I was glad you could not sing.

There was one tiny cloud that began to spread over our sky—Denton did not divorce her. We left him a

note asking him to do so, but we did not tell him where we had hidden ourselves.

And slowly a second cloud came. She did not like the loneliness, and the lack of servants and comforts. She was a gay little girl, and liked people to talk to and fun and life, and she had only taciturn, silent me. Of course I did not understand. I was perfectly happy, I wanted nothing but her, and, like most men, it never occurred to me that what satisfied me might not completely fill her life. She cared for me, but she was a child and wanted her toys. I should have taken her away. I can see it now, but I was so sensitive, I could not bear the thought of strange eyes scanning the flower who was not my wife. I took it for granted she shrank from the whirl of life as sensitively as I. I realise now that she could have borne anything but the loneliness.

It crushed her, the flat monotony of the bush day after day. The wistful look in her eyes often wrung my heart, but still I did not understand. I was such a boy, Peter; I am only forty-three now.

Perhaps, too, the sin of our happiness weighed on her. Who can read a woman's soul? Perhaps she thought I had been too impetuous. I had rushed her into it, carrying her off her feet in the sudden bursting of my pent-up passion. Sometimes she must have wanted her mother and sisters. I tried to be it all to her in my clumsy way, but I was only learning. And besides—yes, I will tear the wound open a bit further, for you must not judge her, Peter—she did not love me as I did her. I could have taught her to in time, but her soul was slow to wake. She had always cared for me; I was her old Jimmy, her girlish sweetheart, but her woman's soul had never been quite roused.

And then—I came home one day and found you alone. Denton had tracked us down at last. He took her back with him. He half-bullied, half-coaxed her into going, I suppose; she was always afraid of him, and I was not there to help her. He wanted his toy back to make his

home look pretty ; besides, he dreaded scandal—we knew that. He had given out all this time she was on a trip. Nobody believed him, but, as they could not say so to his face, it did not matter.

She left no word, no message. But what was there to say ? I was stunned. There was a note pinned on you, but it was from him. It will burn in my memory in heaven ! God ! if even there I can get my fingers round his throat. It was short : “ I have taken your mistress—keep her brat.”

The boy I still was died that night, and the man I am was born. I stayed there because I had no heart to go elsewhere. I grew morose, I cursed her falseness. I hated you because she had loved you so ; there was a wet tear on your cheek when I found you, and you were not crying.

I've been a bad father to you, but a man can't love well more than once. He gives his heart to either his wife or his children, and Trixie has always had mine. I've made a pretty bad mess of things, but it's no use being sorry at this time in the day. I don't ask you to think kindly of me, for you couldn't. I've given you nothing to be grateful for, not even bare justice, but, thank God ! I can at least die feeling I've not spoilt your life as well as my own. Make your man a good wife.

Tell Trixie my last thought will be of her. The doctor says it's only a matter of days now. It's no use my writing to her—when the soul is overflowing words seem futile—but tell her that next time I'll know how to make her love me. I'll spend the time learning till she comes.

Good-bye, Peter ; I never can realise you're my daughter, somehow ; and tell Trixie I have never stopped caring.

JIM DELANEY.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"At Last, My Mother!"

I DROPPED the journal and caught the back of a chair to steady myself, for the room began to swim round me. Poor father! how blind I had been. And Trixie! And then I saw her standing beside me, in her pink satiny kimono, with frightened eyes, and I shook with uncontrollable laughter.

"Mother!" I cried, "at last. my mother!" And all the time I laughed it must have been horrible to hear me; I suppose it was a kind of hysteria.

She flushed and went white. "Jim has told you?" she faltered, looking at the crumpled pages. "Oh, Peter, Peter! Stop laughing."

And all the time was beating like a derisive song in my brain, "Thank God, you won through all right."

"No wonder," I said, thinking aloud, "with such a——"

"Peter, don't say it," she moaned, covering her little baby face with her hands. "I'm not as wicked as you think, darling; don't turn from me. If you knew how my heart has hungered for you, how often in the night my arms have been stretched out to you, but Jim wouldn't let you come. And when he did I gave you all I could. I have loved you, Peter." Her voice sounded wistful. "I suppose you couldn't understand, you are so strong and good. I was always weak, and I wanted to be petted and taken care of. And I was only eighteen when I was married, Peter—eighteen is very young—and I thought I loved Jim. But, oh! the lonesomeness of it in the bush, day after day, and week after week, and month after

month; and Jim was away so much, and it was rough and uncomfortable, and I had no maid—they wouldn't stay up so far—and one day *he* came and told me to go back and not be a fool, and—and Jim was away, and—I went."

The chairs and tables seemed all to be jumping up to the ceiling, and Trixie disappeared in the grey-red mist that was creeping over everything. I could only hear her voice miles away saying, "Can't you forgive me, Peter? Haven't you ever done one tiny wrong thing that would make you understand?"

Such a forlorn little voice it sounded, and with a sudden rush of self-scorn and love I groped blindly for it.

"Mother—Trixie!" I murmured, and slid down to the floor like a baby going to sleep.

I knew no more. That night I had brain fever.

BOOK THREE—THE WOMAN, PETER

CHAPTER I

In Hospital

It's ages since I wrote that last. I'm in the hospital still, and likely to be for some time, I suppose. They have cut off all my hair again—isn't it a nuisance, after all the trouble I had to grow it? It's in those tight, frazzly curls all over my head, like when I was a boy. I'm getting stronger every day; sometimes when I am lying still I can almost *hear* the life trickling back into me. It is very beautiful to be alive—just to be still and watch the sunbeams in the early day net themselves into gold rings on my fingers. My hands are so white and weak, not a bit the brown things I used to saddle Nugget with. I wonder what became of Nugget when father died, and if he and Fran are still there.

It's such a dear little hospital; at least, it's really a big one, but I measure it by my little room which has been my world for weeks. The room is blue like my one at home; my window looks out on the Parklands sloping away to the river, and the post-office clock, and the roofs of the city below just showing over the tree-tops; on a dullish day it looks like a paper parcel with the Torrens tying it up in blue tape. I told nurse that, and she laughed; I have such a dear nurse; she is quite young and plump and mischievous, and she tells me funny stories. But there is a woman dying in the room next mine.

I am not going to die now. I am glad. The world looks such a laughy, sunshiny place to live in, and I am

happy. Quite happy. It gives me thrills to lie and listen to the sparrows fighting each other outside, and this morning nurse let me have a kitten on my bed. It was so warm and cuddlesome, and it chewed my curls and fought the sunbeams, and at last curled itself up to sleep in the hollow of my arm. To-morrow they will let me go out on the balcony. It's a darling, big, jolly old world: I'm going to smile at it always now, and make it smile back at me. Dolly brought me a bunch of violets this morning, huge king violets with mystery purple petals; their beauty almost made me cry with joy. After all, it's these tiny things that matter. I can always have these, and so I shall always be happy. I read somewhere that true happiness is in learning to do without things; I think I have learnt that now.

You see, Peter, where you failed was, you drank your happiness down in one brimming cupful and then cried because no one could fill it for you a second time. You cannot have your cake and eat it, Peter dear, that was what you would not understand. That common-sense little axiom has been hitting you in the face for more than a year, and you have fought and rebelled and struggled, and tried to find love again, and, foolish Peter, you would not see that love crowns a woman's life but once.

Thank you very much for this illness, God. I wonder did You whisper all this to me when my spirit was away from my body. I wonder has my soul, all the time the doctors were fighting for my fever-tossed body, been sitting by itself on a lonely mountain-top trying to attain wisdom: Somehow I think it has.

Can't you see it, Di—a lonely little soul, a wee bit frightened at being out on its own for the first time, flying timidly along, asking other spirits, passing it in the dark, the way to the Mountain of Meditation? And when it reached there it sat down on the tipmost tip of the peak, and sunset and sunrise still found it there, and the moon, slipping her silver scarf over the tree-tops, wound a fold around it lest it should be cold.

And there it sat day after day, night after night, gazing into the space and silence, striving to find wisdom for Peter Piper. I feel like one who, all these months, has been struggling for a foothold on quicksands ; I have been wading through lakes of humiliation, and now I have come out on a great white strand, a beach of moonshine and mystery, the twilight land of Peace. There are no heights or depths, no sunshine or shadow, but the even grey of content. I have found peace.

I have done with love and striving to bury the past. I think I understand now what the Christ meant when He said, " He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it." While I tried to snatch joy from the jealous laps of the gods they gave me only heart-burning and rebuffs ; now I have renounced my quest of happiness and they give me peace. I am happy now—almost. Now, Peter, how dare you add "almost"—you know you are. You're going to be a beautiful old maid, Peter, and dress in grey with white Quaker collars, and listen to everyone's love stories and help them, and take care of Trixie, and spoil all your friends' babies ; and perhaps when you are quite, quite old you may adopt a baby for your very own, and bring him up to be a brave, strong man, brave enough to be good and to make some girl a loving, faithful husband ; and when you nurse their baby on your knees, a baby with grey eyes and curly hair, and who will be called Peter because they both love you, then you will die full of years and honour—No, nurse I'm really not crying, truly I'm not.

It's no good, she won't let me write another word. Good-bye till to-morrow, Di.

CHAPTER II

Jasmine

I'm ever and ever so much stronger than I was yesterday. I feel like a bicycle tyre having vitality fairly pumped into me with every breath I draw. And my appetite makes the doctor smile indulgently. I'm beginning to get back some colour, too, and whole heaps of vanity; it takes a lot to knock that out of a woman, doesn't it? Nurse laughed to-day when I said I was tired of my bed-jacket. Trixie brought me two new ones to-day—one is blue and one white—the white one is adorable, soft Japanese silk, all tucks and embroidery, and such lace on it! I think a whole dictionary of adjectives would crumple up in despair if it had to describe lace, so I'll just call it lace, and any woman would know all there is left unsaid.

Trixie has been worrying about me dreadfully, there are two tiny lines on her forehead; I kissed them away to-day, poor little woman. Oh, dear! she does make me feel such a grandmother, I'm years and years older than she. She was shy of me the first morning she came to see me; she stood in the doorway holding an armful of flowers up to her face to hide it, and looking as if she were half-minded to run away.

"Mother Trixie!" I said, and stretched out my arms to her. In a second she was in them, and the counterpane and I and the floor were deluged with flowers, and in between the freesias and carnations we hugged each other, and nothing else seemed to matter.

"You're not angry with me, Peter darling?"

"Little mother," I said softly; "I've got a real mother

at last. At least, I've had you all the time, haven't I? but it's nice to know."

Her violet eyes were dewy. "I love you, Peter," she cooed over me, "but I'm a wee bit afraid of you at times. You're not like Dolly and me, you're so strong and good, and you have such clear eyes——"

"Don't!" I said sharply, and then went so white that she got frightened and called in nurse, who scolded us both and sent her away.

By a sort of tacit consent we've dropped the subject, only once we referred to it again

"Trixie," I asked, "does Dr. Danish know?"

A sudden terror leaped in her eyes. "Peter, you'll never tell him? Promise me, Peter."

"Then he knows nothing about father?" I persisted.

"What would he think of me?" Trixie wailed. "I only met him after I came back, just a little before my husband died. Peter, you never would?"

"No, no," I said hastily, "I only wanted to know." I leant back on my pillow with closed eyes. More deceit! Is the whole world made up of it?

"There, there, darling," Trixie stroked my forehead. "you're not to worry so and get excited; you must keep calm and get better. Now, darling, don't try to talk, just be calm and my own brave Peter."

I laughed noiselessly. How Trixie-like it was! But it was very sweet to lie there and have her fussing round me like a helpless little bird, and feel it was not charity to a stranger but love service, mine by right of blood and kin. It is very beautiful to be loved.

She comes every day to see me now, and Dolly often does too, and other people. It's awfully kind of them, for sometimes it does get dull, lying down hour after hour staring at the ceiling. Ralph, too, came once; he talked most of the time about Rex, and how splendid he had been in that matter of the money, and how the fellow they had saved was turning over a new leaf completely. Somehow I liked to listen to him. I think I have learnt not to judge

people lately ; there is good and bad in all of us. And I, who so nearly gave way to the temptation to deceive Glen, who am I, to blame others for yielding ?

I am glad to think Rex is getting on so well ; he has gone in with another firm, and has just won a brilliant case—all Adelaide is talking about it. I hope he will be very successful.

Nurse has some joke up her sleeve. She has been quite penny-dreadfulish-sword-and-mask mysterious lately ; she goes about with her lips pursed up and a sparkle in her eye. I've tried lots of times to get out of her what is the matter, but she only looks secreteer than ever, and drops cryptic phrases about girls being little brutes, and the fools men make of themselves over a pair of grey eyes. I can't make head nor tail of it. Glen couldn't have come to see me ? But that's absurd ; Dolly told me he is in Sydney at present. Poor Glen, how I must have hurt him ! It seems cruel that my punishment should spread to others, but he will soon forget me.

Oh, jasmine, do stop scenting the air so, your sweetness hurts. My room is full of flowers, roses and violets, and every day this lovely bowl of jasmine. Nurse has commented on it several times, and always—— Now, I wonder if that has anything to do with men making fools of themselves ? Come to think of it, I've never seen Trixie bring it, and **if it** wasn't her—— Of course he wouldn't, Peter, don't be a fool ; I shall ask nurse.

I am tired of lying in bed ; to-morrow, they say, I may get up and lie on a couch in a gown. I'm sure I shall get better much quicker then. Yesterday the woman who is dying was brought on to the veranda next me. I gave her half my jasmine ; she loves it too. We talked a lot and grew quite friendly. She says she wants to die sometimes, because she suffers so. I don't. It sounds nice when you feel miserable, but when you get to grips with death, and feel his cold breath on your cheek, the sunlight never seemed so sweet before.

She has a pale, thin face and the sweetest smile in

the world, and she is so merry when the pains are not too bad. We talked about flowers and books ; we argued hard about Browning and Swinburne. When I told her I liked Swinburne she laughed and told me it was because I was young and happy. "Melancholy," she said, "is a pastime with you ; when you meet real suffering you want a cheery philosophy to fight it with."

"But I have been very unhappy sometimes," I argued.

"Lovers' quarrels," she smiled.

"I have no lover," I said.

"No ? Not the fair-haired giant who is so pale for your sake ?"

I sat up. "I know of none," I said coldly.

She looked at me in a puzzled way. "I am afraid," she said, "I have made a blunder ; I am very sorry, but I have seen you kiss the jasmine, and I thought—please forgive me."

"Of course," I said, "but I don't understand——" Here the nurses interrupted us. I must get at the bottom of this. I'll cross-examine nurse. A "fair-haired giant"—is this her mystery ?

CHAPTER III

Dolly Speaks Her Mind

JASMINE (that is what I call the woman who is dying) and I are becoming great friends. How often we come to love people just because circumstances throw us together ; meeting casually we would probably not be attracted to each other at all. When you see a lot of people their good and bad points fairly hit you in the eye. I think that's why cousins and aunts often detest each other—they know each other just well enough to notice all the bad points, but not well enough, as brothers and sisters do, to be compelled to realise the good ones.

She seems very clever ; she can talk about anything, like Lucy Rees, but she is quite gentle with it, she never makes me feel the fool I am. Nurse says she cannot live much longer. Isn't it horrible to think of ? Here she was to-day, lying beside me, talking poetry, and to-morrow or the next day she may be nowhere.

"Peter," she said this afternoon, in the middle of reciting some Browning, "shall I tell you where to find the whole philosophy of life, the creed of the average soul ? It's just a verse, and not Johnson's English at that, an odd one that somehow always stuck in my memory. I don't know where I found it nor who wrote it, but when I'm right down in the very deeps it always comforts me. This is it. Can't you see the picture in the blunt words, an old sundowner tramping along doggedly while the shadows creep faster and faster behind him ?"

Here a paroxysm of pain caught her, and she had to lie back white and racked on her pillow till it passed. Then suddenly, without opening her eyes, she began in

a dreamy voice, as if she were only repeating it over to herself :

"I'm sick o' pushin' on to the Lord knows where an' back, For it ends up jest the same, leaves me on the blessed track ; Seems to me I never move, every day's like them that's gone, Still I'm trampin' all the time, pushin' on."

"That's it, Peter, we're all so sick, so very sick sometimes of pushin' on, and yet we stick to it—God knows why, unless it's some elementary grit He implanted in us. Yes, I like that verse, it's a better philosophy than Omar's."

"I like it too," I said, "but I don't know what Omar is."

She laughed nicely. "Just as well. Omar is a tonic for the happy materialist, but bad for you and me. Ah! here comes our mutual tyrant. Am I talking too much, nurse?"

"Yes, you are," nurse retorted. "I'm going to take you inside; you must be quiet."

"I'll be quiet enough soon," she said, almost crossly for her. "Goodness, Peter, don't be silly! Take me away, nurse, the child will be crying in a minute."

"Jasmine, I wish you wouldn't say things like that," I begged.

"Like what?"

"About—dying."

"Good gracious! one would think I was dying from choice. Never mind, we won't talk about it if it hurts you. Good-bye till to-morrow, little silly. and here's someone will liven you up."

I looked, and there was Dolly skimming down the veranda to me. I was very pleased to see her; Dolly is always good company. She seemed unusually happy, and talked like a gramophone.

"Glen's still in Sydney," she told me, "and his people are still up the pole; they look on your illness as something like a judgment for not appreciating the family idol sufficiently. Dad says the house is lonely without you, and he's dying to have you back."

"Really, Doll?" I said, with a sudden warmth round my heart. I do like Dr. Danish, but I never dreamt he would miss me; he is always very nice, but never affectionate.

"Yes, he's quite fond of you, although even the equator couldn't melt Dad to demonstrativeness. And I'm looking after your chickens all right. Maria's hatched out all that lot you set before you got ill."

"The whole thirteen again?" I said incredulously.

"The whole thirteen."

"How like Maria," I said with warm admiration. "Dolly, I'm dying to see her again. And my ducklings?"

"Growing fat and hideous; and Foxy Bill is simply pining for you."

"The darling!"

"He's not the only person either: Peter, why are you so cruel to Rex?"

The attack was so unexpected that I couldn't think of a word to say.

"Of course, it's none of my business," Dolly went on, not daunted by my silence, "and meddlers never get thanked, but I'm fond of Rex, always have been, and, Peter, he's breaking his heart for you."

"Dolly, please!"

"I've always had a fancy you liked him right at the bottom of your heart, but for some reason you won't let yourself. I never believed you really cared for Glen, and I don't now. Why can't you be nice to him, Peter? He's a man any girl might be proud of. I could name half a dozen who'd give their ears to be in your shoes. Why, he'd sit down and make a carpet of himself for you, and my Lady Disdain wouldn't even wipe her feet on him."

"Dolly——"

"I'm going to finish. He's been half-crazy with worry the whole time you've been ill, and he has to go about pretending it's of no interest to him, while his whole soul is hanging on your door-knob."

Dolly paused for breath. I folded my hands resignedly;

it's no use attempting to stop Dolly when her mind is made up.

"I'm the only person who knows, but he saw I guessed, and he doesn't pretend with me. It almost breaks my heart to see him sitting there like—like Samson after they cut his hair, gazing at your photo in the sitting-room. I gave him one."

"Dolly, how dare you?"

"Don't worry. He wouldn't take it; he held it a long while in his hand, and I know he wanted to dreadfully, but all of a sudden he said, 'Thank you, Dolly, but I don't think she'd like me to have it,' and he put it back. That's the sort of man you're trampling on. Oh! I'd like to shake you; if it was any girl but you, Peter, I'd call her a beast. Peter," she leant over coaxingly, "can't I take him a message, a little one?"

"Tell him," I said, my fingers playing with her scarf, "not to worry about me any more, not to think about me at all."

"You—cat!" Dolly said with conviction, "I'll do nothing of the sort, and I'd like to shake you. Oh dear! are you going to cry? Peter, have I been a beast myself? I'm always putting my foot in it. Don't, there's a darling, I'll never mention him again. But, Peter," she whispered as she kissed me good-bye, "he does love you awfully."

After I had had my tea and nurse was straightening my pillow and taking away the tray, I said, "Nurse, who brings me that jasmine?"

Nurse's eyes just ached to tell me, but her lips pursed up valiantly. "I promised not to say."

"How did he bribe you, nursie?"

"He didn't bribe me at all." She grew quite indignant.

"So it is a man?"

"Goodness!" she said, dismayed, "what will he say to me?"

"I'm not cross with you." I said wearily, "I only wanted to know. A fair man, nurse, and big?"

She nodded, and then curiosity conquered. "Such a

handsome fellow," she said enthusiastically, "I envy you, Miss Delaney." She squinted at me sideways to see the effect of her words. I have discovered she has an inordinate craving for love stories and gallons of sympathy for crossed lovers. "And he looked so grave the first morning he called to know how you were. 'Give her this jasmine,' he said, 'it's her favourite flower. I'll send some more every morning.' 'What name shall I say?' I asked. 'No name,' he said with a sad kind of smile. Miss Delaney" (she was busy setting a chair straight), "have you quarrelled?"

She is such a dear little soul, you couldn't regard her curiosity as impertinence. "No," I said after a minute's hesitation. "Why?"

"I asked him one morning if he wouldn't like to see you, and he said 'No'; but he didn't look as if he meant it. Wouldn't you like to see him, Miss Delaney?"

"Goodness, no!" I rejoined with energy.

"I don't believe you mean it any more than he did," the sceptic declared as she left the room.

Now she'll never give me any peace. But it was very kind of him to think of the jasmine.

CHAPTER IV

A Life in Four Words

THEY let us watch the moon rise to-night ; it was fairly warm, and I'm getting so much better and Jasmine so much worse that it didn't matter.

The place was very dusk and still ; in the garden the white aprons of the nurses started out of the gloom as they moved to and fro ; the Parklands sloping to the Oval were a big olive blur. I could almost hear the couples spooning there.

Below, the grey river wound down to the weir. The lights from the bridges and the city streaked it with yellow lines ; we could hear distinctly the clang of the tram-bells going to Walkerville.

It was Saturday night. Up in the city the lighted streets would be full of people, the Salvation Army, and drunks, and North Terrace crowded with little factory damsels in marvellous (and some of them pretty) rigs, likewise their swains ; the restaurants ablaze with electric light, the theatres drawing the crowd, the old pie-stall up at Victoria Square. And here we two invalids sitting in the dark and quiet.

"I can hear the garden talking," Jasmine whispered. So could I ; a chatter, rusty kind of noise rose everywhere about us, as if it were slowly waking up and preparing for a night out.

Then the moon appeared like a china plate behind the hills, suffusing the air with a primrose glow.

"Isn't it lovely ?" Jasmine breathed. "And in a few nights I may be sitting on this same old moon. Aero-

planes aren't in it with death for rapid transit, are they, Peter ? ”

“ Do you think there's a heaven ? ” I said.

“ I don't know, but I do want another chance. Oh, surely there must be. Peter, don't you think God will let us have another try ? I blundered so down here, I've made a fearful mess of my life ; perhaps I'd have learnt wisdom next time.”

“ Yes, Jasmine.”

“ You've never asked me who I am, Peter ; it would be silly, wouldn't it ? for soon I shan't exist at all, perhaps. I'm a doctor.”

“ A doctor ! ” I stared at her.

“ Funny, isn't it,” she smiled, “ a doctor lying helpless ? But though we save others—since I've been like this I can see things more clearly, and I know now where I failed. I knew it when he married her. I'm a Woman of the Brain, and we've got to pay every time.”

“ What are you talking about ? ” I said helplessly.

“ There are two sorts of women nowadays, Peter, Women and Brain-women. In the old days men only allowed Women, and they were born and married and bore children and were happy. But one day a woman discovered she was somehow cursed with a man's brain and soul in her woman's body, and then the struggle began. These are what I call Brain-women. Their spirit calls them to learn and work and fight, and their body, their weak woman's body, calls them to men and love and motherhood, and they do not know which to choose, for as things are they cannot have both. They do not know when they are young what I know now, that the one is a luxury, but the other a necessity. A woman cannot live without love. Perhaps, by and by, they will learn to keep both, and then they will look back on us, the pioneers of their gracious excellence, with wondering scorn that we blundered and fell by the wayside.”

She smiled again her very sweet smile. “ The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church ; but we're only

weak women after all, and I hate martyrdom. It seems so pitiful to have missed happiness if I've only one life, don't you think, Peter?"

I squeezed her hand in silence.

"I was an orphan with enough money to do as I liked, and at school they thought me clever, so I determined to be a doctor; I wanted to *do* something. I had nearly finished when I met him, and we were great friends. I was satisfied, and I thought he was. Then a friend of mine determined to marry him. She was just a woman; she wound herself round him with her soft appealing ways, which fired his manhood and were such a contrast to my cool self-reliance and hard intellectual pride." Her smile grew bitter with remembrance. "I was an excellent foil. I didn't see her plan at first, she was clever in a woman's way; and when I did, I didn't know how to fight her—my woman's education had been neglected, you see."

There was a silence.

"He married her. That's my life."

The music of a band some few houses away came to us fitfully; they were playing a coaxing waltz.

"To think, in spite of study and honours and profession—for I love my profession, Peter—if the reporters only know they could tell my whole life in four words: 'He married someone else.'"

Still the maddening waltz filtered through the silence.

"It's funny in a way, isn't it? and it's humiliating, but it's—woman."

"That's why you're glad to die?"

"That's why I can't bear to die. To go and leave him with her—oh! Peter, there's nothing matters in this whole wide world but love. You asked me if I believe in heaven—yes, love is heaven, Peter." Her hand sought mine in the dark. "Don't *you* make a mistake."

"I have," I said.

"You are young, it's not too late."

I don't know what there was about her that made

me tell her what I never thought to confess to any woman. Perhaps it was the music that stirred something in me.

"My mistake," I said, "is the sort the world never forgives a girl." For a minute I was afraid to meet her eyes, but when I looked up the sympathy in them nearly broke down my calm.

"How you must have suffered!" she said. That was all, not a word of blame or question; she just understood. I wonder if God is like that?

Then I told her it all, everything, Glen too, only not the names.

"I think you are wrong, Peter," she said at last. "He always loved you. And, believing that, I think I am almost sorrier for him than for you. Men are more slaves to their worse selves than we, and to know he has injured beyond reparation his dear love must be keener and more living torture to a man than even yours."

I had not thought of that.

"They say dying people have prescience; I'm afraid I haven't. I can only hope it will come right somehow. You were meant to be happy. But remember, love's the biggest thing in the world, bigger than hatred and pride, bigger than one's own self. And, Peter, remember too, unless you forgive you cannot be forgiven; and to forgive truly means to forget."

"But—but——" I stammered, "do you mean treat him as if nothing—as if he were Dick?"

"He has suffered nearly as much as you, Peter, perhaps more, for the blame is his; he bears it for you both."

I never thought of that either. And still the waltz played.

Jasmine died in the night.

CHAPTER V

A Visit from Dick

THEY buried Jasmine yesterday. There was a big funeral. She was quite somebody, after all. Ever and ever so many rich and clever people came; and they wrote a lot about her in the papers, and the loss her death was to the scientific world, for she had invented or improved or discovered something or other; and they told about her student days and her brilliant career. I made nurse buy me all the papers, and I felt quite awed to think all this was just Jasmine that I used to have such jolly yarns with.

I wondered if she was still smiling that patient smile of hers as she read their unstinted praises, and tracing with her heart-blood across the page, "He married someone else"? I can't get used to her being away. I wish I were well enough to leave the hospital. They say I can go in a few days.

I asked nurse to put all the jasmine Rex sent me to-day in her coffin; I think she would have liked it. I wonder if she's still "pushin' on" somewhere else? I'll try to be as brave as you, Jasmine. Dolly came again last night; it's awfully good of her to spend so much time with me, because she is always busy and it can't be very exciting just to yarn with Peter Nobody-in-Particular.

But I never want to be ill again, it's simply horrible; and I never knew before a bed could get so hard or a back so sore. There are lots of different qualities in different parts of the same bed; Jasmine and I used to find names for them. The middle part of mine, where I rested most when I was too bad to move, I called the Slough of Despond,

and just above the dent I called it the Mount of Expectation, because they always lifted me up higher on it to have my meals. It's perfectly marvellous the way they can lift one. I am much heavier than my little nurse, but she makes me catch hold of her shoulder, gives a small hoist, and there I am, moved as gently as can be.

Nurses are all angels, the ones here anyway ; they come in now and eat chocolates with me. But it's the indecency of being ill I hate most. And I don't like people seeing me in my nightgown.

I suppose I'm in a cross, cantankerous mood to-day, and nothing can go right, but I do miss Jasmine dreadfully, and I wish Rex hadn't sent those flowers.

Peter, Peter, this is not the way to behave on a lovely morning. There are two sunbeams dropping through the magnolia tree and playing see-saw across the bridge of my nose ; they make me a pair of fairy specs. And, Di, you should just see the geraniums to-day holding up their wet, vivid mouths for a kiss ; and the sun goes round the **bed** pecking them all in turn like a large-familied grandpapa.

I'm hungry ; I hope it will soon be breakfast-time. Days are very long in a hospital because everybody seems to wake up in the middle of the night. Nurse comes in and washes me about five ; do you know I quite look forward to it. Incidents like that assume a tremendous importance when you've nothing to do. I suppose that's why the fewer real interests you have in life, the more you cling to forms and little observances.

I like to listen to the trams whizzing by ; when I'm on the veranda I try to recognise the faces of the people in them—sometimes I do. Once I saw our cook, and it gave me a positive thrill of excitement. Scarcely any of the people think to glance up at us white beds. I know I never used to myself, but I always will now. It's comforting to see anyone cast so much as a flicker of curiosity in your direction when lying sick. The most depressing feeling in the whole world is that nobody is in the least interested

in you, and you get that badly when you have to be still, hour after hour, and try not to bother the nurses more than you can help.

The Morrisses seem to be spreading horrid tales about me. I think it's rather unkind of them, because I'm certain Sissie is relieved—we should never have got on together—but I expect they consider I have insulted the family through Glen, and it's easier to forgive an injury than an insult. The only consolation I've got is that Freda won't be my sister-in-law and I'll never have to kiss her again. I think it's horrible having to kiss people you don't care about, for the look of the thing. I think it's such a shame to make that tenderest expression of love an everyday method of greeting. I only like to kiss people just when I want to, not as a way of emphasising their arrival and departure.

Di, if you could see the flame-gum Dick brought me ; it's spreading out its filament flowers like that thread-lollie the Syrians sell on the way to the Zoo ; it always looks so entrancingly delicious, but I coaxed Dick to buy me sixpennorth one day, and by the time we got home the feathery stuff had all melted down to a hard lump like common peppermint. It was so disappointing—most things you admire from a distance are. It made Dick's pocket sticky, too, and that annoyed him.

He came to say good-bye to me, he's off to Kalgoorlie in a couple of days now, so he fetched in for a last chat—brought me a lot of books and the flowering gum. It looks quaint and savage among the roses and jasmine, but it gives me such a pleasant feel to look at it.

How Dick understands ! I wonder why we never fell in love with each other. He came fairly early in the morning, and I gave a perfect yell of joy when his funny old face came over the top of the screen, and held out my arms. He grabbed them both and shook them soundly (he's been away up at the Hill again, you see).

"Well, old chap," he said, "how goes it ?" He

inspected me thoroughly. "You don't look in the last stages of decay."

I grinned up at him in blissful content. The very sight of his clothes was a joy, they seemed to shout strength and health at me, so that I said irrelevantly, "Dick, I feel as if I could get up and go home with you."

He gave me the latest news, a good many things that secretive little cat of a Dolly hadn't told me about her and Ralph; he says everybody expects the engagement any day.

"Goodness!" I said, surprised, "are they as hot as all that? Things must have progressed since I was ill."

"Hot!" Dick echoed. "Apart they raise the temperature, but together one positively perspires to go near them."

Oh, it was just all too short, but he had to go. We never mentioned Glen. Bother thinking! but you can't help it when you've nothing to do but wiggle your toes. I do wish I hadn't promised Dolly, and yet I believe Jasmine would have thought I was doing right. I wonder if I am?

I have promised to see Rex. I've told nurse next time he brings me any jasmine to ask him to come in. I feel all ways about it. I don't want to see him. I don't; perhaps he'll misunderstand my motive—I'm sure Dolly does. Well, it's no use fussing now; I've said I will, and I'll keep my word. But, oh dear! why did I? I suppose because she started to give me a piece of her mind again. I told her, judging by sample, she must have an unpleasant mind; at least, the one she keeps for distribution.

I wonder if he really is as unhappy as Dolly says? I want to do the right thing, but I do dread seeing him.

CHAPTER VI

The Phoenix

"A man's heart is a deep, deep well,
What's in it God alone can tell;
I dinna ken ma ain mysel'."

THIS would keep throbbing over and over in my brain this morning, as I waited for Rex to come. I thought he would yesterday, and I was miserably nervous and hated myself for giving in, but when he only sent the jasmine by a boy I felt quite blank. I suppose it was because I had screwed my courage up to an effort that wasn't needed. I hate to waste energy. Suppose he doesn't come to-day either, or any more? Of course I don't care, it would be a relief—no, it wouldn't; I've promised Dolly to be different, and it would be easier to begin before I get well and distant again.

I wish my hair wasn't so short, but then he's used to it like that. I made nurse bring me a basin of water to curl it nicely with; it's not quite as niggery as it used to be, and I've got on my very prettiest gown, and his jasmine beside me on the table. I've got a corner of the veranda all to myself, too. Nurse is fearfully excited, and trying hard not to show it; she said the bed of geraniums at the back of me made my face look like a pearl on a scarlet cushion. She thinks it's going to be a reconciliation scene. I really can't help seeing a bit of humour in it myself; it is such a sunny, noisy morning, tragedy seems fairly ridiculous.

One of the housemaids is having a nice time at the side gate with a car conductor. Her name is Elsa, and she told me a lot about him this morning as she was cleaning out

my room. She has been walking out with him for three years now, and they hope to get married soon. Lucky Elsa !

He did come. Nurse trotted along the veranda twittering with excitement, and, at her heels, Hercules. He looked more like Hercules than ever in the morning sunshine, he carries those huge shoulders of his so splendidly. I cannot help worshipping beautiful things, and, in spite of myself, my heart gave sudden praise to God for making anything so glorious.

I like his self-possession, too ; he strode along, seemingly unconscious of the stir he was making, for invalids sat up to stare after him, and nurses called excitedly to each other under their breath to come and have a look at Miss Delaney's Greek god—they told me after.

For the first time I gazed at him with a perfectly unprejudiced eye ; he seemed to have more than ever that look of power about him, but it was not only mere physical dominance from his great build and strength, it seemed some new quality, a power of the mind, and wonderful self-restraint, and curbed will that I had never known in the old Rex. So he had altered too !

But when nurse left us, and he lifted his blue eyes and gazed squarely at me, I seemed to look through to his soul, and there I saw such a hell of suffering—perhaps Jasmine was right. Involuntarily I shrank from it. Of course he misunderstood me ; he compressed his lips.

"Nurse said you wanted to see me," he said, "but perhaps she made a mistake."

"No," I said, impulsively stretching out my hand ; "please sit down. I did want to see you. I wanted," I went on hurriedly, for it was even harder than I thought it would be, "to thank you for the jasmine. I did appreciate it ; why didn't you say it was from you ?"

"I didn't think," he said quietly, "you would have cared about taking it from me."

"Oh," I said involuntarily, "have I been as bitter as all that ?"

He smiled a rare smile. "You were justified."

I gazed at him in more bewilderment every minute. That smile was new; so many things about him were new. I felt as if I had been suddenly confronted with a stranger who bore a likeness to someone I once knew. Was he really different, or was it that I had got so used in my mind to picturing him a monster that I couldn't get over the shock of finding him a man?

"Rex," I said, thinking my thoughts aloud, "you're different."

A sudden gleam, like sunlight on a sapphire, made his eyes limpid when I said his name, but he answered quietly enough: "A man learns by his mistakes, Peter; the pity is, he makes others suffer for his blunders who cannot share his profit."

"But I have begun to profit," I said. "I can see now I have been hard and petty. I thought I ought to be forgiven, but I didn't realise others might deserve it too. I"—oh dear, it was hard—"I have been very selfish, I'm afraid, Rex."

"Peter!"

"You have been wonderfully patient and forgiving——"

"Peter, don't mock me."

"I mean it, Rex. I have needed your pardon too. I—I don't think I knew it till this minute. All along I've been treating you as if you were someone else. You—I really believe you are a stranger."

"I am a stranger, Peter," he faced me fairly; "the Rex you knew is dead."

"I am glad," I said softly. "May I be friends with—you?" I put the tiniest emphasis on the last word, and he flushed like a boy with pleasure and then he turned away.

"I think my punishment is almost greater than I deserve."

I lifted my eyebrows.

"When you were unforgiving I almost forgave myself, but now—I never shall."

"Please," I said, "my friend."

He lifted his eyes slowly till they met mine, and he caught his breath. "Oh, Peter," he said, "are all women like you?"

"Rex," I laughed, "you baby!" But laughter is close to tears.

"How I love you!" he said.

Something stirred in me that hurt, and I flushed angrily.

"I can't help it!" He got on his feet. "I can't come near you on false pretences, I've got to be honest. Perhaps you won't speak to me again if I say it, but I must. I love you," he said steadily; "since I met you no other woman has been a woman to my eyes, they were only beings that served to remind me of you. With all the reverence of my heart I want you for my wife. I know I must begin at the beginning, like any other man who dared to hope what I hope. I know I've a bigger handicap with you than any other; I'm willing to face it. If you will only let me see you sometimes, let me do things for you. If you have forgiven me, Peter, give me a chance, like any other man, to make you care. Peter, I love you so."

"Don't," I said sharply, because the ache inside bit keener. "Oh, go away!"

He picked up his hat. "May I come back?" he said.

Then I laughed. "Oh, Rex, you tilt against wind-mills!" (I laid my hand on my breast) "there's nothing here but dust and ashes."

"Out of the ashes," he replied, "rises the phoenix."

There was a silence. He held out his hand. "Good-bye, Peter."

"Rex," I said irrelevantly, "I almost wish you could."

Whatever made me say that?

CHAPTER VII

Convalescence

I THINK convalescing is the most tiresome part of illness. I am so sick of lying still. I think I shall never want to go to sleep again, and if there's half a square inch on my back that doesn't ache, and ache, I wish someone would find it for me. I've read till I'm sick of reading, and I'm getting a double chin with always lying banked up on pillows. I'm certain of it, though nurse only laughs when I say so.

What a snappy old pig I'm getting! But my hair's at that horrid short-long stage again; I seem to spend half my life growing hair; I've a good mind to buy a wig.

They let me get up and sit on a chair to-day for the first time; and, will you believe me, I couldn't stand for awhile. I couldn't believe it myself, although they had warned me; but I felt as strong as a lion in bed.

It was so funny. When I first felt for the floor, sliding my foot down from the bed, it seemed miles and hundreds of miles away from me, and the lower I dropped my foot the farther the floor receded. I felt as if I were going down into the bottomless pit. I caught up with it at last, and started the other foot on a reconnoitring expedition, while nurse held my arm and laughed;

She meanly asked me, too, when I was going to play her tennis, because I just long for it when I'm lying still: My foot got on to the floor at last; I couldn't feel anything, but they had stopped going down, and I could see there was a floor, so I concluded I was on it. I lifted a leg uncertainly and took a step forward. It didn't go exactly

in the direction I wanted it to, but nurse guided me on like a toy on wheels, and we got to the arm-chair at last (it was about four feet away), me feeling sick and giddy.

I wouldn't have believed a few weeks in bed could get one's muscles so out of control. My legs felt like those of threepenny dolls who are jointed on at the hips with wire—they waggled in just such an aimless fashion. I only sat for an hour or two, and then my back ached so much that I had to get ingloriously back into bed.

There's another peculiar phenomenon; when you're ill everybody kisses you, even girls who never do when you're well. I hate being kissed, but when you're ill you're at everybody's mercy.

Dolly came this afternoon. She and Ralph are engaged at last. She broke the news in her usual delicate way. After distributing half a bushel of roses over the room, and giving me all the latest engagements, and telling me about a nice tennis party at Lucy's, and how Maria and Trixie and Foxy Bill were keeping, she suddenly said, swinging her foot to and fro violently, "By the way, Ralph and I've fixed it up."

I gaped at her for a minute or two and then I said, "You haven't! When?"

"Oh, last night." She was very unconcerned.

"How did he do it?—what did he say?" I demanded.

"You mind your own business," she advised kindly.

"Will you be my bridesmaid?"

"Already?" I said. "My word, Dolly, you don't mean to give him a loophole of escape."

"If you weren't an invalid," Dolly retorted, "I'd throw the pillows at you; don't abuse your privileges."

So then I stopped teasing, but I simply can't realise it, it's too sudden. She's going to be married in three months, but Ralph's going down to Port Victor—he's been called, or ordered, or something to it. I don't know exactly how curates are made to change their quarters—the fact remains, he is moving, and he wants Dolly to go with him and face the new flock.

So she is. It's really too much to grasp at once. I think an engagement's quite enough to consider at one time, without having a wedding harnessed in with it. But Dolly's as pleased as can be, and I don't wonder. Clergyman or not, Ralph's a man. She says he's coming to see me for a bit to-night, to let me pour congratulations on his defenceless head. "He says he ought to get them all," Dolly told me; "such a commonplace remark, as I told him." But all the same you could see it pleased her.

"But what," she added sadly, "I shall do when it comes to taking part in tea-fights and attending church concerts, Heaven alone knows! I suppose I can't always have a cold, can I, Peter? And do you think they'll expect me to get up bazaars? I've never been to a bazaar in my life. Oh, well, I'm only engaged now, and sufficient unto the day—— It's most inconsiderate of Ralph to be a clergyman; he says it's inconsiderate of me not to be cut out on the pattern of a clergyman's wife, but on that point, as on every other, I suppose we'll have to agree to differ. An old lady told me once the way to keep a happy *ménage* was to find some fundamental point of agreement, and always fly to that like an anchor or a haven when you're drifting away from each other." Dolly's face was very solemn. "We have discovered one point of concord, Peter. We both hate sugar in our tea. I guess we'll have to make that fact the basis of our married happiness." But anyone can see they are fearfully in love.

I don't think she said anything else important, except that Lucy is away in Broken Hill, and seems to talk very often of one man, so perhaps she is going to get engaged too. It made me feel quite resentful. I don't see why everybody I know need do it at once.

Dot Parks came to see me again this afternoon, she was here last week too, I think it is so kind of her, I never knew she was such a nice girl before. Perhaps being ill makes you notice things more keenly. She wore a white linen coat and skirt, and white shoes and stockings;

through her lace blouse you just caught a glimpse of heliotrope ribbon ; she looked cool and graceful. She brought me a couple of books to read, and chatted about her little nieces and nephews—she seems to have millions of them. She stayed about an hour, and I quite enjoyed her visit, we weren't dull a bit.

When she got up to go she said she had enjoyed looking at my face. I nearly blushed with pleasure ; she is the sort of girl who very rarely pays a compliment ; it made me like her twice as much. It's strange how much nicer you think people are when you find out they have the good taste to appreciate you, isn't it ?

She looked rather pale, I thought, and the shadows under her eyes were heavy, but I didn't remark on it. The only people, bar hypochondriacs, who like to be told they look ill are fat, rosy folk, who wouldn't recognise toothache if they felt it. I wonder if Jack is being horrid to her ? Now I come to think of it, Dolly told me she thinks something is up ; no one has said anything, but she's inclined to suspect there's been a heated scene between him and this Dot. The other one seems to have all the running at present.

I do sincerely hope not. I hate to see other girls' romances break up. When you've been through it yourself you understand just how it hurts.

If I don't call nurse to put out the light in a minute she'll come and do it, so I'd better stop writing;

CHAPTER VIII

Home Again

HOME again—hooroo! It's simply heaven to be back again; not that I didn't love the hospital in a way, and all the nurses, but, after all, one's own folks—I want to go about singing, "Be it ever so hu—u—mble!" It's lucky for the family I haven't got a voice.

Di, you don't know what it is to a girl brought up like me to be able to say that word "family," to feel that it's a live meaning for me; they're mine, Trixie and Dolly and Jack, my very own people, mine by the tie of blood and love; I never quite knew what I had missed all those years until I found them. Now I understand what Rex meant when he said he was lonely. He has always seen the difference between his lot and others', but I only knew my own.

He came round last night to welcome me home, and Dolly nearly hugged the life out of me because I talked to him nicely awhile. It was the first time I had seen him since that day at the hospital, and at first I wasn't sure how to behave, but I took my cue from him. He greeted me with just the same pleasant courtesy he did Trixie and the rest, no more and no less, as if we were friends. I fell into the same attitude in a moment. You wouldn't believe how easy it was, it seemed to come quite natural. Once in the evening I stopped and stared at myself mentally; it seemed unbelievable that it was me sitting there in the big arm-chair, talking to him and Ralph like that.

He sang to us, too. I loved to hear his voice again: it is so beautiful, it makes my heart laugh and cry and

tremble all at once, as if it were an instrument he was tuning; but he would not sing "You are my darling," though Dolly begged him to. He laughed and said he'd sing her and Ralph a song that was meant for them alone. He played a little coon sort of melody and then began:

"Two little owls went sailing
Out in the clouds and rain,
And sat on the garden paling
To get back their breath again.
'It's fearfully wet,' she murmured,
Oh, what are we going to do?'
He looked and he sighed, and then he replied,
'To-woo, little girl, to-woo.'"

Everybody fairly shrieked at them, and Rex's eyes danced with mischief.

It was such a nice evening, but they made me go off to bed early. I've still to be coddled in a dozen different ways, and have to be very quiet, I'm not even to see too many visitors. It's a nuisance, but I do get tired very quickly; it makes me cross with myself. Fancy not being able to walk as far as the lily-pond without sitting down several times to rest! Being in bed does make one horribly weak.

Dot Lavington came round, nominally to inquire after me, and Jack, who was stewing in his room, came out and went away with her. I lifted an eyebrow across the room to Dolly in inquiry, and she closed her eyes in confirmation. So evidently Dot Parks' cake is complete dough.

She rang up this morning and asked if she might come round and see me for awhile. She brought me the dearest little lavender sachet you ever saw; it's made of blue ribbon with lavender bébé ribbon across it, and edged with lace which has blue ribbon run through it. She wouldn't let me thank her, she said one can never have too many sachets among one's clothes, and she made it in a spare afternoon.

I wonder why she is so nice to me? She is not the sort of girl who bothers herself much about people, as a rule, but in her quiet, unobtrusive fashion she has gone out of her way several times to do things for me. You know there was that supper-cloth she offered to make for me when I was engaged; I wonder what has become of it? Neither of us like to mention it, I suppose.

We spent most of the morning down by the lily-pond. I managed to crawl that far, leaning on her arm. It was just heavenly to be out of doors again after being cooped up so long, and to see the whole hemisphere of sky instead of a little square patch of it through a window. Dot had some fancy work with her; I, being an invalid, was privileged to do nothing but admire the scenery and the colour of her stockings—they were deep violet.

Trixie had our tea sent down there, and when we wanted a diversion I set the swans quarrelling over biscuits. Beautiful, slidy, graceful things, the way they shoot over the water reminds me of boys coming down a greasy pole. We didn't talk all the time; she is rather quiet from a conversational point of view, but it's a reposeful kind of quiet, not the sort that makes a hostess switch desperately on to the weather. She seldom laughs, but when she does it's only one short, mellow note like a stroke on a bell. I'm beginning to be certain she's one of those people that the more you see the more you like, and I'm beginning to be even more certain, if Jack's thrown her over for someone else, he is even more of a fool than I suspected. Any man who runs two women at once is a fool or a genius, and Jack's strong point isn't his head.

I wish I knew quite what the situation is, but I should never dream of asking either of them questions, and I don't suppose either of them is likely to confide in me. I wonder why I never found out before how nice she is? I used to think she was a very ordinary sort of girl, and wonder what Jack saw in her; the other Dot is at least pretty and impudent. My Dot is not pretty, but she has a gracious face, and deep wells of eyes. She told me *this*

morning she liked me from the very first, and determined to be friends, but she does not make friends easily.

"I thought I was never going to succeed," she said rather shyly, "but over at the hospital that last time I felt I had somehow got inside your barriers."

"If I'd only guessed you liked me," I said impulsively, "you'd have been there ages ago, but I—you never said anything—and——"

She smiled a bit regretfully as she broke off a thread of cotton.

"It's unfortunate to be born reserved," she said. "I can never say what I mean, and when I feel anything very much I can say less than ever, but I——" she hesitated as if choosing her words, "—I'm afraid you'll just have to try to understand what I think about you without being told, for I shall never be able to tell you, but you're one of the few persons I believe to be absolutely sincere, and I'd trust you with any secret of mine."

The awkward silence that always follows an outburst of real feeling hung over us for a minute. I sat staring at the willows, feeling utterly ashamed. I don't deserve that people should give me the love they do, and I wish I was a better girl.

She held her work a little away from me, debating the relative merits of a butterfly or a spider in the corner, and then she said, "What made me notice you particularly first was a remark a friend of mine made about you. Would you like to hear it?"

I nodded.

"It was Rex Ware; he told me he had more respect for you than for any girl in Adelaide—you were as straight and clean as a lily. He talks rather lightly of girls as a rule, or at least he used, and that made me take more notice of you. Rex is rather hard to please."

She sewed on a few moments, and then said casually, "You used not to like him, though, did you?"

"Not at—not when I first came over," I replied truthfully.

“No?” Her needle pranked idly in and out among the threads, and her face wore a puzzled, thoughtful look. “Had——” then she checked herself hastily.

Dot does not ask questions, either.

It’s hard even for the truest friend to decide where sympathy becomes curiosity.

CHAPTER IX

Peter is Home-sick

HEAVEN preserve us from engaged couples !

I wonder if Glen and I made such objects of ourselves ? You know, there's a perfect atmosphere about an engagement, a kind of mental perfume that pervades the place, and which I suppose is awfully nice for Ralph and Dolly, but trying to those whose noses are out of joint.

There, now, envious Peter, you feel better !

The air is like a seltzogene charged with sentiment, and we always have to turn a handle very noisily before entering a room, and it's so awkward if you forget. If they'd only have one room, and stick to it, it would be easier to remember, but they're all over the house like influenza. Still, they're having such a very short engagement that, as Dolly says, the sweetness has to be concentrated. You know, she's awfully funny about it, she seasons even passion with a dash of humour ; she affects to pity Ralph for what she terms his temporary mental aberration, and still bewails the fact that he's a clergyman.

Yesterday she asked him if he couldn't turn actor. " I think you could easily change from one of those professions to another, Ralph," she said wickedly ; " the essential thing in both seems the same, to pose."

But Ralph only laughs his joyous chuckle, he never gets cross with her ; I believe he is rather proud of her wit. But, for all he can stand jests about it, you mustn't think he isn't devoted to his work. He is, and he believes everything he preaches, and, what is more, practises it too. You can't help respecting a man like that, and through

him his creed. It must be comforting to be convinced about anything. I wish I were. I'm like a cork tossed about by every wave; I do not know anything, and I can't believe anything; all I can do is just try to smile at everyone round me and be jolly; but Ralph says if everyone did that there'd be no need for religion. Dolly was so shocked.

Conversation here is apt to be dull nowadays, it turns mainly on cushions and carpets and clothes. The wedding dresses are exercising Dolly's mind. She's going to have Rex and me for bridesmaids! She wants a second girl, but she won't have one because, if she did, Trixie says it'd have to be Ralph's sister Gwen and she doesn't like her. She was almost diplomatic in the way she broached the subject to me, to see if I'd mind Rex appearing with me, and when I told her frankly I'd be rather pleased than otherwise she actually kissed me. Dolly is not prodigal of caresses.

I got another queer attack of home-sickness to-day. I want Nugget and Fran. Poor old Fran! he is quite well, and still on the old place. I told the lawyers to go on paying him to stop and look after it; I had to put it that way because he'd never take charity, and father ought to have left him some money instead of it all to me; he has been with us so many years, and there is nowhere else for him to go, he is too old.

They wanted me to sell the place, but I wouldn't—there's Fran; besides, some day I may go back there. Really I might, Di, I often dream about it—the miles of scrub in the dawn-wind, and the carpet of everlastings like fallen snow at night, and Nugget's quarters gathering themselves up under me a couple of miles, then turn to the left by Lovers' Rise, and home again round the New Star Mine.

That was the first ride we took together; it seems like a hundred years ago, and yet it seems as close as yesterday. I can understand now what they mean by saying there is no time in heaven; I expect they judge

everything there by feelings, and they are quite equal to paradoxes of that sort.

We're on the edge of winter now ; things are waking up from the summer sleep and beginning to eat and drink and get green. The grass is crawling out in every hole and corner in a reluctant kind of way, and the first rains have started some water in the creek near our place. I think there's nothing more wonderful than to see the new blades popping up among the dry, white-yellow grass that the summer has scorched to death, the wild oats and prickles that stand foot-high like silent witnesses of her relentless heat, and get all in your stockings and scratch your legs.

The creek at Lovers' Rise will be trickling now, and the Forest of Arden green again.

Why are our hearts the only things that never know a second spring ?

CHAPTER X

Concerning Taps

I BELIEVE the human soul is just elastic, it doesn't matter how long you stretch it out in grief, as soon as the spasm is over it goes snap back to its original size as cheerful as you please. I thought in the hospital I'd try hard to be brave and smiling for the rest of my life and I'd never let anyone guess it was spoilt; but the extraordinary thing is, I don't have to try, I can't help smiling.

Of course it didn't come all at once, but I really don't feel different from what I did before; now, I can get just as excited over Bill or the chickens or the garden as ever. Trixie's the same, Dolly's the same, I'm the same—it's hardly believable, and in a way it seems hardly decent, but I am.

Is it because I'm young that I can't stay unhappy?

The only thing is, I don't like reading love stories now. There's a little girl in a pink dress outside flying a kite; it keeps tumbling to the ground, but every time she picks it up with a smile and tosses it aloft again. That child is me all over. My kites have had no luck so far, but I expect I'll go tossing them up until I'm tired. Wonder how old I'll be before I get tired?

There's rows in my fowl-yard lately. Algernon doesn't seem to be on speaking terms with Maria, I think she's jealous of a new pullet I've bought. I wonder if there are farmyard tragedies too? Poor old Maria! What a beast I am! I'll give the pullet to Wilkins; I'll call it Dot Lavington, it's got just that impudent cock in the eye

that spells success. I wonder if that's why I don't like her? Failures always hate success, don't they?

Dolly asked her up to tea last night, and the way she Jack-Jack-Jacked it round the place made Dolly and me want to shake her. At least, it did Dolly; I wanted to shake him more. He's the one I'm crossdest with; although I hate her for t'other Dot's sake, I have to admire her too. She's clever, but Jack's a fool. She's got what she wants; he only thinks he wants what he's got. Men are idiots.

It's a beautiful afternoon, not windy exactly, but the air's just moving around to keep from getting stiff. 'Way below, the factory chimneys round the city look like rickety telegraph poles among ruins. There's a tap dripping on the lawn—drip, drip; and then for variety it comes with a funny little spurt—drippety-drip—— Oh! look, Di, there's a sparrow trying to get a drink at it. The wee fellow flies up and hangs there for a second, his wings going like an electric fan, and the drops falling down his dry little throat; he's made the attempt three or four times, he must be very thirsty.

The palms on the lawn are getting annoyed with this puss-in-the-corner business of the wind; the date palms are the quaintest, they remind me of the wasp-waisted ladies you see in Thackeray with their hair done Marie Antoinette style.

The leaves of one of them are becoming badly ragged; it's the image of a lady in an open car without a net on her back hair. I wonder if in the night they talk scandal and use the cotton palms for fans? I like the shadows they cast on the lawn better than themselves. It's the elusive and the incomprehensible that always grip one's fancy, like heaven.

Here's another birdie for a drink. I think if I were that tap I would get so tired of dripping. Fancy having to drip, whether you wanted to or not, till someone turned you off. After all, to believe in free will is the only thing that makes life worth living, isn't it? Otherwise one would

feel like the tap. And over by the fence is a tecoma, yellow as sand.

I'm talking an awful lot of rot to you, Di, but I feel in a lazy, chatty kind of mood and everybody's too busy to talk to me again. Dolly's trousseau fills Trixie's mind to the exclusion of everything else. It mainly engages Dolly's attention too, what time Ralph leaves her, and in a way I would be quite lonesome if it weren't for Rex. Of course Lucy and Dot Parks and others come to see me, but, although I've lots of friends, Glen had monopolised my time so much, from the beginning, that I've no very great friend who would always be dropping in, for even if I'm nominally better I still have to lounge about and not excite myself.

But Rex can come as often as he likes, and no one comments on it. He's used to coming, too, you see, for before I came, as Dolly says, he half-lived here; he has no people of his own, and it was like a home to him. And somehow or other the old relationship has sprung up again, no one knows quite how, but we all feel comfortable and contented; he is always about, never obtrusive, never in the way, but just there when wanted, as Dolly put it. She's as pleased as can be that we have buried the hatchet. I can't understand myself how it came about, but we are great friends now. We stroll about together, and chaperone Ralph and Dolly, and smoke cigarettes on the lawn; and sometimes we even talk about Magnet, just a little. It is all so far away, and we are both calm and polite about it. You can talk about things when you've stopped caring. Romance is only amusing served cold.

But oh, Di! if I were only meeting him for the first time, how I could like him.

I've discovered why that tap drips, it's for the birds to get their water from; there are half a dozen in a circle round it now, taking it in turns to fly up for a drop. The tap needs a new head or screw in it, Wilkins says.

I wonder if we defective taps are any use to God?

CHAPTER XI

Broken Hearts

I WENT round to tea with Dot Parks to-day. Her sister-in-law was there with the dearest baby you ever saw. They all thought it pretty; I didn't; I don't think any bald-headed, slobbery-mouthed, four-months-old lump of jelly can deserve an adjective like that, it's degrading the word to use it. But this was a jolly little chap; it had big blue eyes that looked as if they thought life was a joke, and fiery ginger hair in straggles over the pink pate that somehow strengthened the impression. They call him Alcibiades, but his name is only George. I could have nursed him all day. Even if babies *are* ugly I adore them.

Dot and I are getting very friendly; it's funny now grief seems to draw people together. It's quite off between Jack and her now. He is a fool, for she's worth twenty of the other giddy-pate who orders him round like a brigadier-general. What fools men are when it comes to picking women!

We did fancy-work most of the afternoon; I'm making a point-lace top for Dolly's wedding nightgown. Dot is still on that supper-cloth she commenced for me, but we've agreed she'd better give it to Dolly now. The wedding is coming off fearfully soon. The whole household is upside down, arranging things and getting her trousseau together. It does seem absurd to think of Dolly getting married.

Di, I wish you could see Alcibiades sitting up in his pram, hurling defiance at the sparrows who are bold enough to come near him. Oh, he's a mighty warrior before the

Lord, aren't you, Alcy? But the sky seems to fascinate him most; I wonder is it because a baby's mind is so near the infinite that it needs infinity to gaze at.

The supper-cloth looks exquisite, it's simply full of spiders and butterflies and other queer grubs. I wonder Dot doesn't ruin her eyesight over it. If Dolly isn't pleased she ought to be. I told Dot I didn't feel like giving it up now, and it was almost enough to make me get engaged again so that I might have an excuse for claiming it. But I wished I hadn't when she said quietly, "I shouldn't be surprised to hear you were." Then she laughed and added, "That's not meant for a pun on his name."

It is so awkward if we can't be friends without people saying things like that. I suppose we'll just have to live it down, but it is a nuisance because it may make Rex think— Anyhow, it's no use meeting trouble half-way. We are such friends now; he helps me from being in Dolly and Ralph's way. When the four of us are out together I think I'm dreaming everything that happened last year—four of us still, and the only difference, Rex instead of Glen. Glen is still in Sydney.

But I am so sorry for Dot. I do think Jack is a cat. Of course we don't talk about it; unasked sympathy is only impertinence, I know that myself from sad experience. She keeps a stiff upper lip, but I know she feels badly. Once she gave way and cried, but neither of us has referred to it since. It was dark, and you know how one is tempted to give confidences and other silly things at that time of the day. I forget quite how we got on to the subject, for I knew nothing beyond that Jack was always with the other Dot now. I wasn't aware anything had actually happened, but Dot told me they had had a quarrel.

"Of course it was all my fault," she said, twisting her handkerchief nervously as she spoke; "I lost my temper, and then Jack got mad too, and I told him to have his old Dot if he wanted her, but he shouldn't have me;

I was just furious, and he said, all right, he would, and went off; and the next time I met him he was with her, and that's all."

I squeezed her hand in silence, and she choked back a tear, but her voice quivered.

"It wasn't fair of him," she said pitifully. "We'd been fond of each other for years, and everybody knew about it, and now of course they all laugh at me, cut out by another girl. The cat—the beast! She might have minded her own affairs and not come poaching. She knew he was mine, and there are lots of other fellows in Adelaide besides Jack; but no, she must start asking him to picnics and parties without me, and making eyes at him, and of course Jack thought she was nice—— But he liked me best still," she went on miserably, "and he would have come back if I hadn't got angry. But I'd tried not to mind for ages and ages, you know I did, Peter; if only people hadn't talked it would have been all right. I didn't mind Jack liking her as long as he liked me best, but I did people laughing at me. That's what they used to do. I don't know how they can be so cruel; they used to go out of their way to tell me of places they'd seen Jack at with her; I suppose they pretended to themselves it was a kindness to open my eyes"—she clenched her hands passionately—"as if when you cared for anyone it didn't make you keener-sighted than everybody else. It wasn't all at once. I used to push their hatefulness out of my mind and be just the same to Jack, but they kept on shooting their beastly little darts; week after week I'd hear something new. If Jack took her to the theatre someone would rush to tell me, and I had to smile every time and pretend it didn't interest me; and then one night, just after one of them had gone, Jack came—and that was the end."

I said nothing.

"And the awful part," she went on after a pause, "is that I can't stop caring. If he only knew what a day's life means to me—every one seems like a century:

I wake up dreadfully early, long before anyone else, and then I begin to think. Sometimes, Peter, I bury my face in the pillows and bite them to stop moaning, it's—it's like physical pain."

She stared straight ahead and spoke in a low dull tone as if she were thinking to herself. If Jack could have seen her at that minute! Men are cruel. I must have spoken unconsciously, for she echoed my words.

"Yes, men are cruel. I don't think he ever cared as much as I did, but I could have made him if she hadn't come between us, for he cared a good bit, and anyway a real woman doesn't want a man to give her back as much as she gives, she only wants him to let her love him. Dot doesn't care for him like that, and he won't let me—Peter, the pity of it, he won't let me. And I think about it all the while I wait for breakfast, and I work at anything I can see about the house to tire me so I can't think, and then I find there's nothing to do, and I can't fill in the time. I try to play the piano, to read, sew; I've even gone and done my hair differently and changed my dress to occupy myself, but I can't do anything for long. And if I go out and see people it's always like a shadow at the back of my mind. But the nights are the worst; he used to come up at nights, and—and when I go to bed I lie for hours staring up at the ceiling. I can't sleep or eat, and I have to keep cheerful and not let my people guess. I couldn't bear *that*. But sometimes I think I'll go mad; I wish I could, or else to sleep—anything to forget. Sometimes, in the day even, I'd sell my soul for an hour's sleep, just a respite. And then I—I keep remembering all the things he used to say to me and——"

She cried for a few minutes in a repressed, passionless kind of way.

"Poor old Dot!" I said softly, and stroked back her hair.

After awhile she straightened up. "I wish I hadn't told you," she said; "you must think me a fool."

She goes about dark and quiet—smiling as ever. No one would guess she cared.

Me and Dot and father—what a lot of broken hearts there are wandering round the world! It reminds you of a peach-tree, doesn't it? The blossoms are too crowded for all of them to bear fruit. I wonder if anyone ever cares about the flowers that get pushed out?

I do wish I could help Dot. I'm sorrier for her than for myself, because I suppose I deserve what I've got and she doesn't. I think it's more painful to bear other people's sorrows than your own.

Poor old Dot! I just hope the other turns out a shrew and bullies the life out of Jack.

CHAPTER XII

Looking On

I'VE discovered such a lovely way of amusing myself—I make rhymes. I never knew I could, and it's such fun. Rex just roars with laughter at them; he says my metre's got stringhalt and the blind staggers, not to mention other diseases, but I'm sure it's not as bad as that. I wrote one to-day about him and Glen; that is, thinking about him and Glen made me write the poem, which isn't really about either of them.

That's where imagination comes in. Pegasus needs the earth, that's a little fact, to spring from into the air, but after that he can sail along quite comfortably on his own and the earth doesn't worry him any more. Poets are just like that; they need a particular instance from which to delve out the general truth it contains.

You know I often feel so sorry about Glen and Rex, they were so tremendously fond of each other; I guess they are still, for I'm sure Glen must be miserably ashamed of his treachery by now; he will be, anyway, as soon as he gets over his infatuation for me. I do wish they could make it up somehow. To think a friendship like that—for Rex often called him David in fun—could be upset by a girl! What a lot of trouble women do make in the world!

But Rex didn't see the poem applied to him at all, he only cried with laughter. We never can say what we mean; the most deep-rooted sorrow often sounds funny when told. There's something commonplace and humorous about speech; I suppose that's why silent grief is the most impressive.

But I can't see my poem's so comic, can you, Di?
I'll tell it to you.

Time gallops on, and one by one
The old friends drift away,
The pals so true when the world was new
Are lost when the world goes grey.
For though we swore that evermore
Love's flame should burn up keen,
There's distance and death and slander's breath
And—the girls who come between.

At the call of a pal I'd march through hell,
But a girl's red lips are sweet.
At the rose-hung gate, when the moon is late,
Lord, how the moments fleet!
The smoke-air's dear, and the yarns you hear,
But even while they speak
You taste again through the wordy rain
The fragrance of her cheek.

It seemed all right till we met last night,—
For the new wine has its charm —
A girl I know had me in tow,
And Bill with one on his arm.
We grinned and passed, such chains cling fast.
But I thought of the pals we've been,
And for half a breath I hated like death
The girls who have come between.

I don't think it funny at all, I think it's sad. Dolly getting married made it come into my head, too. It's Friday week; getting awfully close, isn't it? And I feel so lonesome sometimes. I have grown so fond of Dolly, and at times I just hate Ralph for taking her away from me. Lucy's gone and got engaged, too, to some man or other—we don't know him—and there's only Dot and me left to comfort each other. Dolly and Lucy needn't have gone and done it together, for men do make a difference between girls, or even if they don't you feel they ought to, so it amounts to the same thing.

Of course, I'm awfully pleased Lucy's engaged if she wants to be; she isn't cut out for medicine, anyway;

I'm sure I can't tell why she ever started it, for she's the sort of girl who can't get on without men; still, I suppose her fees have helped on the 'Varsity.

Keep looking on the bright side, Peter!

Dot and I are going to the cricket this afternoon; it's going to be pretty hot, I'm afraid. She came to lunch and is inside now talking to Dolly. She won't come often to our place now—not to tea or dinner, anyway; she'll come to lunch because Jack is never home then—but I go up a lot to her place. Every day I find her nicer, she has such a sweet, slow manner. She looks almost pretty to-day; she has a violet dress on, and a big black hat with violets dotted over it like flies on tanglefoot; she rarely smiles, but she was always rather grave even in her happy days. I do hope we won't run into Jack and the other Dot down at the Oval; I know he's taking her.

I feel so puzzled about the situation, for really, you know, I can't help liking the other Dot a bit too, now I am beginning to know her better. At present we see a fair deal of her, for, though they are not openly engaged, Jack told Dolly he means to marry her, so of course the family has to sit up and do the civil. She reminds me of Trixie; she's built on the same plump, curvy lines, and she's got a most infectious giggle, and she seems fond of Jack. After all, I suppose everything is fair in love.

But it must be absolutely fiendish for my poor Dot to see her parading round with Jack, so I hope we don't meet them. I don't like cricket a bit, but you see everybody you know there, and such adorable dresses. I dare say, too, we'll meet Rex; I wouldn't let him come with us, because Dot says it makes her feel a gooseberry.

That is very stupid of her, for we are nothing but the most friendly of friends; we never could be anything else—I'm sure Rex has given up the idea. He is always sensible, he never says anything Dolly and Dot might not listen to. But of course they don't know that.

I don't mind a bit about Dolly's trousseau now. I made her a braid petticoat the other day, such a beauty.

I've planned out my whole life ; I shall be a beautiful old maid, and help other people make their trousseaux and babies' bonnets for ever and ever ; and Rex will come and take me out when I feel lonely, and we will be friends until we die.

He says I ought to write an epithalamium—is that the right word ? I mean a marriage song—on Dolly and Ralph, but I don't believe I could. I can't realise the wedding is so close. You ought to see my bridesmaid's frock, it's a simple dream.

Dolly says she's sure Ralph will do something wrong if she doesn't, and every day she warns me afresh not to tread on her train. Trixie's in her element, spending money.

Rex and I are lookers-on. That is going to be my rôle again, I'm afraid, like when I was a boy—just looking on at life.

CHAPTER XIII

Others in Arden

It's queer how intimate Rex and I have become again. I never would have believed we could, even a few months ago, I was so blinded by my hatred. At least, I thought I hated him, but illness seems to clear up your mind as well as your body and give it a new start.

I honestly and sincerely like him. I don't understand myself a bit, but that is true, Di. We like each other; it's two creeks converging, we cannot help ourselves. It seems as if from the beginning of things we were meant to. I wonder is there anything in those old transmigration theories, and have Rex and I always been mixed up with each other's lives before, that we cannot keep apart in this?

For that's the truth again, Di; he is so much a part of my life once more, that I can hardly picture it without him. I'm afraid to try, and again I can't tell you how it came about. It didn't exist, and then suddenly it did, like those tropical plants that come up in a night, or else you might compare it to the birth of a child. It's only alive in anticipation and the hearts of those who desire it, and then suddenly it's there—a living, kicking, and mostly yelling fact for all the world to handle. Our friendship is like that.

And, you know, we don't live in any rarefied place of exalted emotion; we aren't aeroplaning about in the clouds of reverential tenderness, although there's always a strong man's tenderness that's not expressed—but that in a way permeates his every action and word to

me. But, all the same, we laugh and tease and half-quarrel with each other, just like any other ordinary friends.

I wouldn't have believed it possible once; I thought the memory of our—well, I thought, you see, we could never get away from it. It shows how little I knew of life. We scarcely ever think of it at all, and, anyway, when I do it's nearly always when Rex is away, not when he's with me. It's so very far away sometimes that I think I only dreamt it. It doesn't seem to belong to life and Peter Delaney at all.

It's as if we'd made a tacit agreement to ignore some things, and when we do get on to the past, as you can't help doing, inadvertently even, the way he speaks of it never hurts me; I don't know whether it's because of the way he says it, or because he is just Rex. After all, there is nothing like a true friendship. I have never been quite so peacefully happy in my life before; I think he is, too, though sometimes he says tiny things that disturb me vaguely.

To-day we were down at the lily-pond—Di, how sick you must be of hearing about that place!—but it did look fairer than usual to-day. The clumps of arums stood straight and proud on the brink, disdaining even to gaze at their mirrored selves, they were so sure of their beauty; the variegated bamboos were more anxious, every now and again they swayed forward for a peep and then shrank back half-afraid to look at what they so desired to see; the sky was a glowing sapphire, the pond a piece of blue glass, and the air an invitation to sleep.

Dolly and Ralph were lazing underneath one of the willows. They looked like a Dicksee painting, and, somehow, as I gazed at them I felt a sudden twinge of envy, such as Adam and Eve must have felt after they'd been turned out of Paradise, if, coming back to peep over the railings, they'd seen another man and woman inside still unspoiled and innocent.

"Rex," I said impulsively, "they've found Arden,

too." Then I tried to turn my sudden queer jealousy off with a laugh. "Find a motto for them, Rex."

A sudden little flash leapt into his eyes, making them like the sky, but it faded quickly as he said, "The whole play belongs to them now, Peter; they've only left one line for us."

"Well?" I said as he paused.

"Can't you guess?"

I shook my head and pulled a dandelion to pieces.

"How hard it is to look at happiness through another man's eyes.' We didn't need that line when the whole play belonged to us, did we, Peter?"

"If you get sentimental," I threatened, "I'll laugh." But I didn't feel a bit like laughing. Isn't it funny I should have got so cross with Dolly and Ralph?

But with his usual sensitive courtesy he followed my lead. "Did I tell you," he said mirthfully, "that I went to see sister Margaret last Sunday?"

"No, you didn't," I replied. "What for?"

"Well, you said I wasn't to come and see you; there was nothing else to do."

"My dear man," I said, "there are dozens of other houses, and dozens of other girls who would have been delighted to see you."

"I don't care to go anywhere else, and you know it." For a minute he looked at me gravely. "Anyway, as I haven't been near them for eight months, my conscience bade me go and play the good uncle. Margaret has four children. Can you imagine me a fond uncle, Peter?"

Every inch of his six-foot-two was one silent yell of mirth, which I translated aloud. "No, I can't," I said.

"I was. I talked football to the boys, and let the two small girls sit on my knee, they were remarkably solid." He stroked the aforesaid knees in tender reminiscence.

"Why, how old are they?"

"One about ten, the other thirteen, I should say."

"Oh!" I only remarked. But I think at that age

they ought to know better than to sit on Rex's knee; he's not even their proper uncle, as their mother is his half-sister, and, anyway, they don't know him well, for he hardly ever goes there. But what has it got to do with you, Peter, anyway?

Rex pursued his rumination. "In between gourmandising chocolates——"

"Which you took them."

He ignored the interruption: "they fought for the honour of putting their arms round my neck, and as I happened to be the battleground, as well as the *casus belli*, my collar and shirtfront suffered. Do you see a scratch down the side of my nose, Peter? That's a testimony to Wilhelmina's affection for me; it was intended for her sister."

"What it is to suffer from a handsome face!" I said a little tartly. I'm sure I don't know why I snapped; it's nothing to do with me if he has fifty nieces, grown-up ones too, but he looked downright triumphant for a second or two. I don't see why my being bad-tempered should please him particularly, and I was about to say so when he suddenly pointed and said, "Look!"

I looked! I wonder if I could tell you about it, Di? I think it would need an angel accustomed to transcendental glories even feebly to convey its splendour to you. The west was a high bank of violet clouds, like mountains; between the hollows of them were little bays of blue-green sky, over which white smoke drifted now and again like spray being flung over the crags; above was a belt of flame which gradually dropped around the purple hills; it was like Hades passing into oblivion on the last day.

It was beautiful, terrifyingly beautiful, and I didn't realise for a minute we were holding each other's hand tightly; and when I did, I didn't like to draw it away, it seemed like emphasising things; so we sat and watched the evening drop her black mosquito netting over day.

"Doesn't it make you feel lonely?" Rex whispered.

It didn't seem right to speak loud there. I nodded:

"Life is such a short thing, such a tiny thing in the face of the sunsets. They show their prismatic beauty year after year, age after age, world after world, and we ants of Nature come and go, and the sunset glows as indifferently for us as it did for Antony and Cleopatra, as it will for another Antony in a hundred years. Peter, don't you see that to hoard youth is to waste it? It is like a cup of water; guarded jealously it evaporates in the sun of days, but use it to freshen the flower of love, and it lives intenser, more glorious and eternal."

"How like Fran you talk," I said uneasily, and trying to get the subject back to a conversational level. "Are you very lonely, Rex?" I could still see the shimmer of Dolly's dress, it looked as if Ralph was kissing her.

"I am a lonely man, Peter," he replied gravely (he had let go my hand); "I am thirty-two now, and you are only twenty, but when you are as old as I, you may understand what loneliness can mean, though I pray God you never will. I have no kith or kin near me, no one to whom it would make an atom of difference if I died to-morrow."

"Rex!" I cried reproachfully.

"I said difference, Peter; you would be sorry—at least, I like to think you would, but that is all. It's a horrible feeling that you don't matter. I thought work and success were what made up a man's life, but I've found success is tasteless unless you've someone to enjoy pride with you. Work's no use unless you've someone to work for, someone at whose feet you can lay your little triumphs as a burnt sacrifice. It's my own fault, I know, that I'm lonely—I had my chance in fairyland, so very long ago it seems now. In the enchanted Forest of Arden I met love, Peter, and, not knowing its worth, I let it go by, and so I'm lonely, very, very lonely, waiting and hoping that perhaps God and"—he smiled whimsically into my eyes—"Peter may give me another chance."

There was a very long silence.

"Sing something," I said abruptly. As usual, he

obeyed me without demur. It is only the strong who can be weak; a weak man feigns strength.

"Any orders?" he said naturally again.

"Anything you like," I said.

His face against the darkness was like a statue's hewn in stone. Sometimes I think there must have been a music festival on in heaven when Rex was born; and, as his soul stood shivering in the pearly gateway, before sliding down the rainbow earthwards, the little outcast must have turned back and cried a last "Hosanna to the Lord!" before the gates clanged to, and he was born with that golden cry echoing in his throat.

"Give me thy hands and press them to my heart,
Give me one kiss, and all my doubts depart,
For I have learnt the sympathy that lies
Like tender flowers within those hidden eyes.
Ah! love, give me thy sympathy,
Give me thy sympathy."

His voice swelled and thrilled and died away, but the air still shivered with passion.

"Rex," I cried incoherently. "I do, I do—oh, indeed, Rex, it isn't that I won't—I——"

"There's no such word as can't," he said. "Dearest——"

"Orpheus!" (Dolly's voice was only two feet away from us, therefore presumably so was she—grass is more silent than carpets), "Orpheus, come in at once, or the dews will ruin your musical-box."

You can't start a talk going again, once it's been interrupted, can you?

CHAPTER XIV

Preparations

HEAVENS! I wish it were Saturday instead of Tuesday. A wedding is more nuisance than anything else on earth. The house is all upset, and people keep coming in from morning till night; we never have a minute to ourselves. Either it's dressmakers or caterers or marquee men (we're going to have two on the lawns), or people come to see Dolly, and even the postman seems to give us extra visits.

Dolly has the exquisitest trousseau I've ever seen, not that my acquaintance with them is extensive, but it is very lovely. She has a dozen of everything, and they're composed mainly of tucks, lace monograms and medallions—that's what you'd say on a superficial view, anyway. I made her wedding nightgown, you know, and all the girls rave over that; Lucy was so smitten with it that I've promised to make her one too—I wish I hadn't—still, she's going to have a long engagement, so I shan't be so rushed. I don't like doing fancy work when there's other things to spend your energy on. I think it's only to fill up if your life is getting dull.

Every afternoon or evening there's somebody in to see Dolly's things; it's just like holding a perennial reception. Trixie is as generous as she is loving, and that's saying something. She's the only one of us that seems to be really enjoying herself; the bustle and the eternally opening and packing again of pretty things seem like medicine to her. She was a little quiet and upset for a while, after she knew father had told me, but now she is gayer and prettier than ever.

Dolly ought to have an awfully nice home. I'm to

go and stay with them, in about a month, when they've settled down. You see, I need a rest, and they think Port Victor will be the very place for me. It will be quiet then, for all the summer visitors will have gone.

Of course, I know lots of people will think it's a silly thing to do ; young couples should be left to themselves, and all that sort of thing, but I reckon they can get too much of each other if they are not careful—that's Dolly's opinion, too. I want to put up at one of the boarding-houses and just visit her, but she won't hear of it. She says in a month they'll be fighting each other with the flat-irons, and I'll be simply invaluable as referee ; secondly, I'll be company, for it'll take her some time to get to know people, and Ralph will have to spend all his days visiting old women and talking scandal at choir practices.

That's Dolly's version of it, of course ; how she'll pan out as a curate's wife makes the family pale to consider, but I guess it's Ralph's affair. Poor boy ! it's his bad time now ; Dolly is always too busy to speak to him, and when he comes to the house he's smothered in a whirlwind of things feminine. I suppose clothes do bore a man when there's nothing inside them, but they're a source of inexhaustible joy to Dolly and me.

Whenever I feel sad I go and look at my bridesmaid dress. Dolly decided to have two of us, after all ; she defied Trixie and convention and asked Dot Parks. She was going to have Rex and me at first, you remember, but she told him later he wasn't ornamental enough in the way of decoration, and she'd have another girl as well. That, of course, makes us see a lot of each other too. I was down at their place this afternoon, and Dot was up at ours in the morning. We've had to go shopping together to get our shoes and gloves exactly the same, you know, and really I like her hugely. She likes me too ; she says I keep her merry. I told her that was a good thing, for the Proverb man says, " He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." Dot is very religious, so I am

always hunting up texts in the Bible to hurl at her when we have an argument; she daren't refute them.

But I was going to tell you about our dresses. They're unusual, like Dolly—mole colour, almost elephant's breath, with the same shade gloves, shoes, stockings, and hats. The skirts are pretty short, and the stockings such a quaint pattern, with elephants worked in them. The hats have scarlet berries on them, the underneath is scarlet, and we carry scarlet berry and fern bouquets with long ribbons. Not another note of colour anywhere, except coral ear-rings. Our necks are bare, cut square (the dress-necks this time), and we wear no ornaments at all.

I'm sure it will be awfully effective, and Dot and I can stand scarlet, we've both clear skins. I wish we could take Alcibiades with us, slung in a sort of flower cradle, it would be most uncommon, but I suppose he'd be sure to cry, and Dolly, anyway, won't hear of it.

He sprawled on the lawn at our feet most of the afternoon. Dot picks him up as comfortably as if he were her own, but she's got several married sisters and she's always been used to them. I adore him, but I'm rather afraid to handle him for fear he'll break, or drop, or do anything else dangerous. I think I'd rather like to be a nurse-maid.

Rex dropped in to see Dot on his way home from the office. They have known each other all their lives. Alcibiades took a tremendous fancy to him, and tried to eat the hem of his trousers and the blacking on his boots, till finally Rex met his advances half-way and nursed him, and the little turk sat, as pleased as anything, on his knee, blinking at us in a triumphant sort of way as if he were saying, "Wouldn't you like to change places with me?"

I was sure he meant that, and Dot agreed with me. His eyes are a blue like Rex's. It seemed so quaint to

see him nursing a baby, the wee thing leaning in the crook of his great arm so contentedly; and he smiled down at it too, quite at his ease, though Dot teased him unmercifully and called him daddy. Rex only laughed in his good-natured way and said, "Oh! Alcy and I are great pals, aren't we, old chap?" And Alcy seemed to agree with him.

It's strange such a giant should be so gentle and considerate for weak things. I begin to see now what loneliness must mean to a nature like his. He can't help loving people; I think he loves the whole world. Sometimes he isn't thirty-two a bit, he's just a big, sunny-hearted, mischievous boy; and how his mother would have adored him if she'd lived! It's a queer freak of fate that one with a nature like his should be an orphan. If I were a mother I should like a son like him.

He had a merry mood on, and he made us laugh like lunatics—even Alcibiades crowed at one tale; and when he'd gone Dot turned to me with flushed cheeks and dancing eyes (I'd never seen her so animated before) and said, "Isn't he a darling? Everybody adores him. He's just the same whenever and wherever you meet him. He never goes back on a pal, and he's always jollying somebody along. A laugh helps you over the stones awfully, don't you think?"

"Yes," I agreed. I was a little surprised by her outburst, for Dot is usually so reserved, and the comic part was I nearly said "Thank you" to her instead of "Yes." I felt as if she had been doing something for me by praising him. And to think when Dolly did it I used to be angry. Somehow I can't believe that was me. Our past selves are as much strangers to us as are any other people.

Later on in the day she said, "He and Glen haven't made it up yet, I suppose?"

I shook my head. "I don't know anything about it."

"Such a pity," Dot mused. "I wonder what they

quarrelled over? Everybody does, I think; they were devoted to each other. Rex never says anything about it, but I think he feels it still. He must; one can't kill love in a day, even if it is badly treated." She smiled a wry little smile and then said abruptly:

"Peter, what made you get engaged to Glen?"

CHAPTER XV

Dolly's Wedding

THANK goodness, it's over! I believe everybody must ejaculate that after a wedding; it's a most fearful lot of work and bustle. From the moment we got up in the morning we never drew a peaceful breath till we saw their motor disappear round the corner. Such a chapter of accidents too. I thought we'd never get Dolly dressed, things kept getting mislaid; and, even when we got down the road some way in the motor, Dolly gave a shriek of dismay and said we'd left her gloves behind, so back we had to go; and the veil got lost too before that, and we spent a frantic half-hour searching for it, while Dolly sat on the bed and remarked pleasantly that Ralph might wait till the middle of next week before she'd be married without a veil (as we despairingly suggested), after the trouble she'd taken to sew blossoms on it.

Finally it was unearthed beneath a hatbox, and I was going to say calm was restored, but I won't, I'll say things were a trifle less cyclonic. Dot and I spent the journey telling each other how nice we looked, and hoping the seams in our skirts wouldn't give way under the strain of being seated. Dolly's parting admonition, hissed over her shoulder as she entered the church door on Dr. Danish's arm, was, "Tread on my train if you dare!"

We were only half an hour late or thereabouts, by

some merciful dispensation of Providence, and Ralph was there waiting nicely. The poor boy had nearly given up hope. He and Rex had proceeded to the altar at the appointed hour of sacrifice, and stood for an uncomfortable ten minutes, but, when Dolly wasn't forthcoming, at Rex's suggestion they retired to the front seats and passed the time with lugubrious pictures of the married state, drawn by Rex impromptu and free of charge. He told me after.

However, when he heard our toot-toot down the road he made his second debut, and it all went off as uneventfully as most weddings do.

Dolly looked—well, just like a dolly. She really did; as if she'd stepped out of a shop window dressed for the occasion. One guest—he's a Count something or other, on a visit here—called her "*Un joujou, un délicieux joujou blanc coiffé de fleurs d'oranger.*" Rex says he means the same as me. Anyway, she couldn't have looked daintier. The church was full of whispers.

And you should just have heard that organ; it shouted with joy and cried a little because we were losing her, and then sang high away up, in clear flute notes, how much they loved each other and how happy they were going to be; and when they finally came down the aisle with Dolly's veil thrown back, she trying to look as if it was all a false alarm, and Ralph going as if there were a fire in the building and he was endeavouring to save Dolly, the organ fairly roared with laughter. I wanted to go and hug it. It understood perfectly.

It's no use telling you any more about it, is it, Di? Weddings are all alike, and all boring to outsiders. They had a big sit-down luncheon or wedding breakfast or something in the marquees (it was really tea), and in the evening we had a dance in one.

But Dolly and Ralph had to leave early to go wherever they are off to for a few days—they wouldn't tell anybody, she only had her luggage addressed to the station from here.

They slipped away between the dances, so that no one knew when they were gone, and they weren't bothered with rice and confetti and other rubbish. I think it was rather a clever idea, don't you?

Dolly must have had the time of her life while she did stay, for the boys simply fought for the honour of dancing with her, but I suppose she'd sooner have been with Ralph. Life always gives you things when you don't want them: He broke through his rule and danced too. He said he guessed he was entitled to on his wedding day, and we had a lovely waltz together.

Rex and I had some beauties, too. He's the exquisitest dancer I've ever met, and he says the same about me, which is lovely but untruthful of him. It seemed so quaint at first; we'd never danced together before. He told me I could never dream, even, how he'd often wanted to last year. He said sometimes, when I was waltzing with Glen and the others, he felt like springing in and snatching me from them.

"And what do you suppose I would have done?" I laughed. His blue eyes were only a few inches away from mine.

"I **didn't** suppose—I knew—that's why I didn't. What would you have done if I'd asked you to dance, Peter?"

"But you wouldn't."

"I nearly did, sometimes. I wanted to speak to you so badly. What would you have done?"

"I don't know," I replied thoughtfully, "but I shouldn't have danced with you."

"I say"—he looked suddenly troubled, and his arm loosened its hold—"do you mind now? I never thought—if you do even the smallest——"

"Rex," I said, "do you want me to put my hand over your mouth in front of all these people?"

Dot said to me afterwards (she had been watching us with rather a curious expression once or twice, I noticed), "Peter, you and Rex do make a hand-

some couple. You look as if you were meant for each other."

Isn't it awfully nice? I forgot to tell you, Di, Rex will be down at Port Victor for a few weeks about the time I will; he says he's a bit run down and needs some rest. He's getting on awfully well now, they say.

CHAPTER XVI

A Letter from Dolly

How time flies ! It's nearly three weeks since the wedding already.

I haven't talked to you before, Di, because there's been nothing to say, life's been going on in the same old fashion, I am not allowed to go out much or excite myself even yet, so things are inclined to be a trifle dull, but I amuse myself very well with Foxy Bill and my fowls and Rex. He comes fairly often, and he always keeps me laughing from the minute he arrives till he goes.

He is a dear, big, silly boy—I do wish he had someone to look after him ; it must get desperately monotonous for a man with strangers the whole time. He says his landlady has a face—well, words are inadequate, he always yearns to remove the milk-jug from her vicinity, and one of the female boarders is almost worse, only she couldn't be ; they're a dead heat, and they both disapprove intensely of him. Rex says that when he looks at their lugubrious countenances he feels like saying, in the words of the classic poet, "Smile, damyer, smile," only he knows it would have the effect of making their faces longer still.

I asked him why he doesn't move, but he says he's sick of changing his quarters, they're comfortable enough, and every place has some drawback or other. "The only place that hasn't," he said, "is a man's own home when——"

I pretended to be absorbed in Foxy Bill, and asked him if he had been to the theatre lately.

He says everything has panned out beautifully, he can get away a couple of days after I do, and has written

to the hotel for a room. He guesses Dolly will want me to herself for a bit. "You're sure to have a lot to talk over between yourselves," he teased; "I wonder if you will be able to exhaust the main topics in three days?"

I am looking forward to it ever so. I've never been to Port Victor before, and Rex has been lauding the rocks to me, so he makes me curious; and he says we'll go over to the Bluff and West Island, and Encounter Bay too, so it ought to be nice.

I had a letter from Dolly yesterday, she seems pleased with life still; she said she's getting used to being called Mrs. Manners, which shows middle age is descending upon her, and that Ralph, when he introduces her to anyone as "my wife," doesn't say the word now in a tone that invites heaven and earth to listen to it. Her house is rather pretty, and she is beginning to learn the difference between carbonate of soda and maizena; one never-to-be-forgotten-day (Ralph won't let her forget it) she made a pudding with carbonate, and put the maizena in the cabbage! She adds that Ralph often suffers from mysterious pains which he ascribes to her cooking, but which she declares are the pangs of disillusion. "I get them myself," she wrote, "but the ridiculous part is, Peter—and mind, I tell you in strict confidence—the disillusioning makes him out nicer than ever before, which seems against the rules, doesn't it? But he is rather a dear; I'm sorry if I've mentioned the fact before."

The letter is all she and Ralph, and the rocks, and how pleased they are with each other and life, and so forth; it made me feel a bit lonely. I wished Rex would come round. I miss Dolly more than I thought I would, she was so lively, she always had a joke for a mournful face, she kept the family salt dry with the wind of her wit. After all, I believe humour is a better antidote for bad temper than all the resignation of the angels. Patience in others, when you feel anything but patient yourself, is only an added irritant.

She's had one perfectly awful experience. Some

practical joker (and Dolly's going to have his scalp when she finds out who it was) slipped a handful of confetti in her new green parasol and carefully fastened it up again, and Dolly—but I'll give you her own account :

"Behold me dressed for church, Peter, after much perspiring, and heated observations from Ralph, who considered it quite too much for one morning to have to wrestle with his own collar and my hooks as well. However, the (fortieth, according to Ralph) last look in the mirror assured me my dress was remarkably nice, and even the Bear melted enough by the time we reached the church door to give me a smile of admiration as he left me. Don't get annoyed, Peter, the poor dear can't help himself, and he'll get over it in time.

"Naturally I took my new Sunday-go-to-meeting broolly with me, but as it was not very hot I hadn't opened it going, which made me exclaim later, 'Oh, all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord,' to the intense approval of one of our parishioners.

"Observe the 'our,' Peter. But she didn't know what caused the outburst, luckily.

"I waited for my lord and master after the service, and as we got outside the gate I OPENED MY BROOLLY.

"Oh! Peter, and again O-oh!

"In view of the whole departing congregation, a shower of confetti, like manna from heaven, descended upon us. I've always been taught in my youth to shudder at the fate of those Jews—I forget their name—who were swallowed up in an earthquake, but that morning I envied them.

"And my sweet-tempered husband for once actually reproached me, without choosing his language either.

"But, after all, who could help laughing? Still, I'm afraid Ralph will soon starve, for I shall never have the courage to go and face the world again.

"*Note.*—My world here is represented mainly by the shops. Riddle: 'What is worse than to feed a hungry man?' Answer: 'To feed two hungry men.'

"I suppose that's what I'll have to do soon, for I hear Rex is coming down in your wake. Peter, you're a bad female.—Yours ever with love,

"DOLLY (don't laugh) MANNERS.

"P.S.—You'll have to treat me with respect now, and don't you forget it. Oh, Peter! it's gorgeous, being married. I feel like saying to everyone, 'Go thou and do likewise.' The other day was perfectly terrible. I'd been humming that phrase over to myself to various tunes, and when the vegetable man came he told me his lettuces were rather dirty owing to the rains and they needed a good washing, and, Peter, I said thoughtlessly, for the wretched refrain was still in my head, 'Go thou and do likewise.' Do you think he'll come back again? Ralph will be so sad if we can't get any vegetables.

"Hurry up, Peter, I'm dying for someone to talk nonsense to. It's so oppressive being Mrs. Manners all the day long. I want to be wicked Dolly again to someone. So do come.

"I expect you Thursday—oh! and I forgot, Ralph sends his love!"

CHAPTER XVII

Heartaches

I'VE been pretty busy the last few days packing and collecting my clothes. It's perfectly marvellous the amount you need to take with you for a few weeks. From the size of my luggage I'm afraid Dolly will think I've come to live.

And then I've had lots of things to fix up about my fowl-yard. Wilkins is going to look after the fowls for me while I'm away, but I don't like trusting him with them; you do get to thinking, when you're used to doing a thing, that no one can ever quite fill your place. I'm worried too about Maria, she looks rather seedy. I gave her a pill of butter and cayenne pepper this morning though, so I have hopes she will improve.

My chickens are doing splendidly, I'm taking a few of the older ones down to Dolly; she hates fowls, but likes fresh eggs, so she's effected a compromise. Ralph is going to look after them when I leave. I'm taking Foxy Bill, too, for company; besides, he fretted so when I was in the hospital, I'm afraid if I leave him again so soon you won't be able to tell which is the shadow and which the dog.

Trixie says she'll be miserable without me, and even Dr. Danish said last night I would be missed in the house. I was too surprised for the minute to answer him. I was so delighted, though; he seldom says anything nice, so when he does you value it. I believe I'll miss Dot Parks as much as anybody else. I was round there this afternoon; she had some girls to tennis. Of course I'm not allowed to play yet, but I helped Dot with the tea, and we talked a bit and watched the others;

Lucy was there, displaying her ring, and inundated with questions. None of us know the man, who is an engineer at the Hill, so naturally we are fearfully curious. She is getting quite thin, and she explained it was the effort of trying to live up to his ideal of her. It must be wearing to marry a man with ideals.

Dot looked so nice; she wore a rough violet tweed skirt and a creamy blouse. She rarely wears anything but purples; I think it is so clever of her, it makes her quite distinctive to have a colour of her own. It always makes me feel like a poacher if I put on anything heliotrope. I've two sweetly pretty new frocks to take with me to Victor, one is grey and one a greeny-blue; they both suit me rather.

It was delightful in the shade of the trees, watching the girls dash round in the sunshine with faces like tomatoes that have just been watered. The Parkses have plane-trees planted all round their tennis-court, which shelter it both from sun in summer and wind in winter. I told Dot it made me feel a lady to be sitting there, cool and white, instead of rushing round with a racquet, but that was only sour grapes. I made a start on Lucy's point-lace.

Alcibiades was there in his pram, taking lessons. He had the discrimination several times to applaud Dot Lavington's volleys. She does play a splendid game, there's no doubt about it; for all she's small she's as active on the court as a cat; she can get from the back-line to the net in less time than it takes to breathe. My Dot sat beside me and watched her without a muscle on her face moving, but her dark eyes were inkier than usual. Once at an extra brilliant rally she called out evenly, "Good stroke, Dot!"

I stared at her, and she turned and met my gaze.

A queer little smile crept round her mouth and she said, "Dot does anything well she takes up; she always succeeds."

"Dear!" I said involuntarily, and caught her hand;

“I wish I was dead,” she said in the same quiet voice, but on the hand away from me I could see the knuckles show white through the skin. “Or I wish she was. I suppose if we were not civilised I should try to kill her; as it is, we kiss each other. You can’t understand, Peter.” And for the first time a little gust of passion swept through her voice like a wind in the plane-trees. “You don’t know what it is to be flung off like an old shoe. We were not engaged, but it was only because he is not through yet; everybody knew we would be, as soon as he got his degree, and now—why—— Yes, mother, more tea? I’ll go and see about it.”

She moved in her slow, graceful way across the lawn. Once she stopped for a second to watch the play, and again I heard her voice, “Splendid, Dot!”

What a queer old world it is, all pretty and bright on the surface, and everybody with heartaches! Do you know, Di, life reminds me of a human body: it’s all fair soft flesh outside, but everybody’s hides a hard, ugly skeleton.

So Dot went inside to get tea, and I sat and nursed Alcibiades.

She did kiss Dot Lavington good-bye.

CHAPTER XVIII

At Port Victor

I'VE been at Port Victor three days now, Di, and I'm in love with it. Likewise I'm in love with Tommy. Don't shriek, Di, or display your amazement in any other undignified fashion—Tommy is five years old. Dolly says it's really over the fence to be saddled with a ready-made family before she's even quite resigned to a husband. But she doesn't care for children, and though she makes the best of Tommy, as she would of toothache, she regards them in much the same light. So I have taken charge of him.

He's the dearest little chap, just like Alcibiades will be in another four years, even to the ginger shade in his straw hair, and energetic—but I've found he adores fairy tales too, so we get on splendidly together. I forgot to say he's Ralph's nephew, and has been very bad with measles; the doctor prescribed sea air for him, and, as his people are not well off, they asked Ralph if he could come to them for awhile.

Dolly assented with more politeness than cordiality, but it is rather rough on her to be bothered so soon with outsiders, for she'd never set eyes on the child before, and she's always remorsefully trying to take him off my hands, saying I must be worn out; but I'm not a bit, I really enjoy being with the imp, he has such quaint ideas.

It's just the thing to see Dolly again, too. I was hanging half-way out of the window long before the train got into the station, and when we did see each other I could have squeezed her to death; but Dolly hates public

affection, so all we did was shake hands and say, "I am glad to see you, old girl," but we stood and beamed at each other idiotically for a few minutes, and then Dolly returned, as it were, to business.

"Let's collect your luggage," she said, "and give it to a carrier. We'll walk home, it's only a little way; you must be dying for a wash and a cup of tea. Fiendish journey, isn't it? A train that takes five hours to do sixty miles ought to be ashamed of itself. And how's Trixie and Jack and Dad, and your beloved fowls? Oh! Peter," her voice quivered, "I'm gloriously happy, but I do want to see them all dreadfully sometimes."

But in a minute she was laughing again—Dolly always was a lightning-change artist in the matter of emotions—and she positively swelled with pride as she showed me over the house. It's quite nice even outside for a sea-side place (you know how the salt air deals with paint and mortar), and inside, of course, it was as dainty as a bride's house ought to be.

Dolly told me I'll have to amuse myself most of the time, for what's holiday to me is workaday to them. "Ralph's out most of the time," she explained, "flirting with the females of the parish, and I sit at home, like Martha, and cook. I'm on the way to becoming a piece of kitchen furniture, Peter—me, a student of psychology and philosophy. My psychology is now trying to divine what Ralph 'd like for dinner, and my philosophy is shown by putting up with his rude remarks about it. You're a beautiful cook, aren't you, Peter?" she rattled on as we were getting tea. "One, two, three, that's right. No, four plates; you forget the blessed Tommy. I don't know what Ralph wants to have relatives for, they've never been any use to him so far, but when I point it out all he says is 'Live in hope.' Oh, what was I saying? Yes, I remember, but you shan't try your omelettes and pies on my lord and master, or you'll be weaning his affection away from me. Six weeks of wedded bliss has taught me a man's affections follow his food. Alack!"

she sighed so prodigiously that a startled rose fell out of its bowl, "cynicism is sad in one so young."

We went on with cheerful nonsense like this till Ralph came home. If Dolly's cooking is all she makes it out to be he must have a wonderful constitution, for I never saw him look better in his life. They both look splendid, and the disillusion Dolly mentioned don't seem to have exactly cast a cloud over the home.

Ralph seemed as pleased as Dolly to see me; he told me after he was afraid she was a bit lonely at times, although she never would admit it, for she didn't know anyone down there as yet, and I was a real godsend to them both. And I really love to be with them too, I don't feel a bit in the way. If I did I'd go to the hotel like a shot.

This evening we went over to the rocks. Isn't it a great walk across the jetty, and round the bend, and up the steps, with the sea beside you all the way singing at your feet until you get on to the rocks themselves, boulders like mountains, and the full roar of the open ocean smashing itself against them in clouds of spray!

I had a telegram from Rex this afternoon; he gets down by to-morrow's train.

CHAPTER XIX

Memories

I LIKE Port Victor more and more. And really it is nicer since Rex came. He's such a perfect sort of person to go out with ; we seem to understand each other's thoughts, and we never say the wrong thing. Dolly always does. When we are standing on a rock jutting right out over the growling waves, and the sun is making the sea in the distance like a big Japanese gown with white birds flying across it, and the breeze in your nostrils is like a razor, and the tingling of clean joy trembles all over your skin, Dolly will say absently, "Lovely, isn't it ? Peter, that reminds me I've forgotten to do the beans ; we'll have to go home early."

It's simply amazing what six weeks' marriage has done for Dolly, she's turning into a mere cooking machine. Rex says Ralph must have proposed to her something like this :

" Oh, Dolly, make home sweet home for me
With carrots and cod and the lively pea,
Mix parsnips and puddings in every course,
And serve up our love with tomato sauce."

Dolly threw a saucepan at his head when he declaimed it to her, and Ralph roared. But the change is surprising. She, who wouldn't soil her hands at home, takes a perfect joy in sweeping floors, and making beds, and washing dishes ; and when I ask her what on earth has come over her, all she does is laugh and say, " Wait till you find the right man, Peter."

Truly, love seems to work miracles. A big passion

that is capable of a big sacrifice I can understand, yes ; but an everyday wearing love that can transfigure the monotonous round of household duties, no.

Dolly is a puzzle. And yet—I don't know, the night I was making those scones, and Rex sat watching me, with the damp still shining on his clothes, it did seem different from—— I don't know why in the name of fortune you will keep remembering like that, Peter. Do you want to spoil things again ? But that was the night he asked to be pals, and Fran told us about Brazil and the mermaids. I wonder if he remembers—— Di, I can see it now, the red glow of the flames on Fran's shirt, looking now and again as if he were catching alight. Rex told me my ear was like a rose-leaf ; how pleased I was. But then I was so young. I wonder if he thinks me pretty still ? He never says things like that now.

For goodness' sake, Peter, pull yourself together and stop thinking silly nonsense. I'll have to take more exercise ; I suppose one could hire horses down here. You know, Di, it's the air of this place ; lying on the rocks hour after hour, with the sun seeming to melt in honey over your limbs, sends you into dreamy, drowsy reflections ; it seems to relax your mind as well as your body ; all sorts of vague hopes and half-shadowed remembrances flit through it, and you feel shivery, and happy, and apprehensive, and full of a pleasant melancholy all at once.

We spend a lot of time on the rocks. Rex calls for me fairly early in the morning, and Dolly hastens our departure ; she'll scarcely let me do a thing in the house, she's so proud of her privilege of making herself a maid-of-all-work for the beloved Ralph that she is positively jealous of giving anyone else a share in it. She sometimes comes out with us after lunch, but never in the mornings. However, Tommy, like the poor, is always with us.

We read half the time, or listen to the song of the surf and make up fairy tales. We play them for Tommy on occasions. We started with Cinderella, and Tommy chose the characters. He dallied for a long while with

the desire to be the Prince, but finally he said to Rex with an air of great magnanimity (of course I just had to be heroine, there being no other lady present), "You can be the Prince and I'll be *all* the other people."

The play was a huge success according to Tommy, but when it came to the Sleeping Beauty, Rex said he wanted to be the wicked fairy, and anyway it was Tommy's turn to be Prince. There didn't seem to be any people about, and I hope there weren't, or they would have thought us escaped lunatics. Rex said they wouldn't, they'd have put us down as honeymooners quarrelling. Lots of them come down here; you stumble on them in all the nicest corners, and the new-comers look furious at having come too late, and the occupants furious at them for having come at all.

We finished up with Red Riding-Hood, and Tommy howled with joy at Rex's deep wolfy growl, and killed him with an energy that reduced them both to breathlessness, so we sat and fanned ourselves, laughing like three children.

When Tommy wandered off to invent a new way of risking his life, Rex turned his brown merry face to me and said, "My word, I shall have to look up these tales again, or Tommy will be down on me like a ton of bricks. How they insist on the details, these little imps. Have you still got the Blue Fairy Book, Peter? Bring it out to-morrow, and we'll go over them again."

I nodded, looking at the sea.

So next day I took it out—battered and beloved old thing!—and we read the tales together: the beautiful girl who dropped pearls and diamonds out of her mouth, and the brave little tailor, and Snow White and Rose Red, and the goose-girl who cried:

"Wind, wind, gently sway,
Blow Curdken's hat away;
Let him chase o'er field and wold
Till my locks of ruddy gold,
Now astray and hanging down,
Be combed and plaited in a crown."

It was so exciting and queer to read them all over again together. When it came to the one about the maiden who turned into a water-lily, Rex was reading :

"The horse on which the prince and the maiden were riding had just reached the middle of the bridge when the magic ball flew by. The horse in its fright suddenly reared, and, before anyone could stop it, flung the maiden into the current below. The prince tried to jump in after her, but his men held him back, and in spite of his struggles led him home, where he shut himself up in a secret chamber and would neither eat nor drink, so great was his grief."

Rex's voice died away, and he was looking at me with troubled eyes. I found the silence awkward too. We played that in Arden ; it was the day he kissed my feet. He got up abruptly and said he wanted to smoke. Somehow a cloud seemed to have come across our friendship. Jasmine didn't know how hard it is to forget.

It didn't go away even by the time we got home, so after tea I slipped up to the church to have a think. I often go there when I am worried or extra happy, the quiet and peace of it all brings you back to calm. I like the dusky corners of the altar and the painted windows. There is one of Mary in crimson robes on the right, and facing her a head of the Christ—a fair, pale, conventional Saxon Christ, with a soft beard and a sweet cynical smile round His mouth. He seems very far away and gently disdainful of the seething world about Him, but that is what comforts me ; He seems to say, like Fran, "Nothing matters," and that gives me peace.

CHAPTER XX

Dreaming of Arden

WE went down the Hindmarsh River this afternoon, Rex and Ralph and Dolly and me and, of course, Tommy. That child is gracious to the eyes with his mischievous mouth and sunny hair, but I don't like to see him wriggling over Rex the way he does, he is too like him. Dolly cried one day, "Why, it's ridiculous! he might be your son, Rex," and, somehow, since that I don't care to see them together. But Tommy is always on him like a limpet, he adores him.

We went around to the post and collected the letters on our way down; there was one for me from Dot Parks, and one from Trixie. Dot's was disappointing; she writes like her outside manner, stiff and reserved, and, having got past that to the real Dot, I'm not sensible of it any more. Her letters are like a douche of cold water, although I know it will be all right as soon as I see her again. Some people can't reveal themselves, can they?

I read Trixie's letter to them while we rowed up, and through them paying attention to it instead of the boat we got stuck on a sandbank; however, we managed, by a special dispensation of Providence, to push off with the oars without the boys having to get out and get wet. I love to watch the rhythmic swing of men's arms as they row, and the muscles rippling on their shoulders.

Her letter was quaint as usual. Dolly must get her humour from Trix, for the Doctor hasn't a scrap. She began, as all letter-writers do, by saying there was no news—everybody was well; the cayenne pill had revived Maria's fighting spirit; and she hoped I'd soon get tired

of Victor harbour, for without us both she felt like an orphan. Also, to distract her thoughts from us she had started to read a handbook on somebody's liver pills left on the doorstep by an agent (the book, of course, not the pills), and in it was a small advice to husbands which might be useful to Dolly and Ralph, so she enclosed it in case the agent had taken no thought for their livers. Whether it was to be useful as a guide or a warning, as Dolly complained, she did not state. We read it out in the boat with appropriate gravity.

" 'Don't quarrel with your wife,' " Dolly exclaimed, " 'even when she annoys you.' Hear that, Ralph? "

" 'Women hate newspapers and serious books. Don't let your wife rob you of your literary pabulum.' Well, I'm—the conceited little animal." Dolly's wrath was almost speechless. "My word, if I could meet him I'd talk—I'd talk Egyptology to him till he crawled under the table. What's next? "

" 'Treat your wife affectionately, and conceal nothing of your life from her.' First approach to sense he's made," she commented, and the two men shouted with laughter.

" 'Endure the frivolity of your wife, but don't let it go too far.' " Dolly's sniff, which seems to have declined in volume since her marriage, surpassed previous records. "Throw the silly thing in the water, Ralph," she ordered. "It's an insult to the eyesight."

"They're certainly crude," Ralph admitted sorrowfully. "I, even with my short experience, could amend these. How's this for a try, Dolly? "

" 'Don't quarrel with your wife, and don't let her annoy you.' Means of preventing her not stated.

" 'Treat your wife affectionately, and conceal everything in your life likely to distress her.' "

"Well——" Dolly began indignantly.

"Hush, I haven't finished. Now the next—let's see, I have it. 'Endure the frivolity of your wife; remember she can't help it.' "

But here I joined forces with Dolly and he had to

stop. Isn't it a joyous feeling when just nothing at all makes you laugh, when you feel over-bubbling with spirits that have to make an outlet somewhere ?

Tommy hung over the edge of the boat dabbling his hands in the water. The law of association works in queer ways ; all of a sudden I saw that night on the Torrens again, but it left me cold. How is it emotion can never be resurrected ? " Poor Glen ! " Dot said in her letter, " he is back again." The Hindmarsh is a prettier river, though. It is full of turns and twists and shallow side pools, followed by a bendy narrow way between thickly-bushed banks, then the open country on either side again, then once more you will be shut in by the gums. It's mysterious and unexpected.

We got out at the tea-house and had strawberries and cream, leaving the boat tied to a log below. Do you know, Di, I believe I shall have to run away from Ralph and Dolly or I'll suffer from chronic melancholy ; sometimes I almost can't bear to sit and see them smiling into each other's eyes with that confident expression. It keeps stirring up what I've missed in life, and I must be contented.

I believe they upset Rex too. Once up in the tea-house he looked from them to me, and at the back of his eyes was that funny pain I had not seen lately. I wish he didn't feel bad too, one of us is enough. I wore an oyster-coloured kind of dress, and a hat with emerald underneath and a blue-and-green shot gossamer ; he said I looked like a shell as we sat on a little patch of sand.

Dolly says I grow lovelier every day—I wonder if I do ? Perhaps the very nicest part was when Tommy got tired of looking for the fish and insisted on cuddling up in my arm. I watched his little cheek against my shoulder and started dreaming things. I would have kissed him, but Tommy thinks he is too big for kisses ; and while the sun crawled down the west we let the boat drift with the current awhile, and Rex sang to us and the darkening woods. We didn't thank him, words are too poor for a gift like

that. A tiny silence followed, and just as Ralph made a gesture to take the oars he began again very softly.

Dolly clutched my arm and whispered, "It's the gipsy one he'll never sing." Then she hushed. We all sat there like part of the shadows; it sounded as if the river had found voice at last.

"You are my darling,
You are my soul,
Light of my life,
My sun, my goal.
You are my being,
My delight,
Star of my darkest night."

He sang it to me once again; I do wish he hadn't. It made me feel so—anyhow. I had to do something or cry, so I kissed Tommy. He was too sleepy to protest.

The sun was setting when we were still a mile away from the boat-shed—a fat, apoplectic, gasping sun who blew deep crimson breaths all over the landscape in his efforts to wriggle into bed, which seemed too tight for him. We rowed along on a river of raspberry vinegar.

Bit by bit he squeezed himself in, and the sky began softly to drop her coverings upon him; first a sheet of blue, then sea-green, a primrose quilt came next, and a heavy eiderdown of amethyst, and then she hung a canopy of old-gold above his head and lit a crescent moon to light him to sleep. Once we went past a huge bush of wild rose, climbing carelessly and gigantic in its overgrowth, its leaves spread out in delicate tracery across the splendour of the west. Dolly whispered that it looked like black lace over yellow satin.

The men rowed steadily, she and I watched the glimpse of the sun's domestic arrangements, and Tommy went to sleep.

It was almost dark when we stepped out of the boat—that clear summer evening dark, that has a thread of light spun through it. Dolly and Ralph went on ahead carrying Tommy, still in the Land of Nod. Rex and I

followed. The night seemed alive, and the long white road an endless promise before us. It didn't seem as if we had to go anywhere, we were just walking, walking, walking on in a dream to fairyland—just the stars, and the dark shapes of the bushes, and the long white road. I think the way was bewitched, my feet seemed to dance along on air. And I was happy, one of those moments of pure unreasoning happiness life flings us now and again, like a petulant mother making amends with an orange.

We never spoke all the way home. Once Rex opened his lips, but I said quickly, "Don't spoil it," and he gave me one of his wonderful smiles.

"Are you pretending—too?" he asked.

I was, Di. It wasn't wrong of me, was it? But I've only dreams left now, never the real again, and—I did just say to myself we were back in Arden. But it was only for a little while, and I know it could never be true.

I wonder why dreams make you grumpy next day?

CHAPTER XXI

Only One Thing Matters

WE'VE been having the hugest fun for a couple of days. Tommy is to go home in a week, and we wanted to make the last of his stay as pleasant as could be, so we've spent the time being hilarious for his benefit, though I really believe we enjoy being silly as much as Tommy does. We go on the beach, and make castles and gardens to play the tales in ; and, if you try, the sand is nearly as good as the bush for make-believe.

Tommy went wild with joy this morning. We had gone for a long walk along the beach towards the Bluff ; it was a dull-looking day, so we put on weather-despising clothes, and of course ran into all the church people—one always does, I notice, when not dressed for what Dolly calls the soul-and-pocket enlightenment. But we were glad farther on, for it began to powder rain, so we tipped an old boat on its side and sat in it.

Rex against orders leant back, so Tommy looked at me and I at Tommy, and suddenly and both together we got up. Tommy shrieked with glee as Rex disappeared backwards with the boat ; I enjoyed it nearly as much myself. I suppose I am a baby, as he says ; and as he chased us down the beach, and we threw sand at each other, it was no wonder Dolly remarked on our tidy appearance when we returned.

I felt too tired to go out this afternoon as I had promised, so I took Balzac's "Droll Stories" out of Ralph's book-case, and retired with an umbrella and Tommy to the microscopic section of lawn sheltered by a plane-tree, at

the side of the house. Dolly affects to despise this oasis in the backyard desert; she says it must give passers-by the impression that the dining-room tablecloth is out airing.

Foxy Bill invited himself to the gathering, and later so did Rex. He sat down and fanned himself.

"What are you reading?" he inquired. "'Droll Stories!'" He frowned at it. "You oughtn't to read this sort of stuff, Peter."

"Why not?"

He frowned again. "They're for men, not for women."

"There's plenty of women in them."

"Not your sort."

I smiled queerly. "I thought they were."

"Peter," he said in a hurt voice; then he turned abruptly. "Look here, Peter," he said, "I can't stand it any longer. I've tried to be patient and wait, but we can't go on like this. All this rot about being friends"—I started—"you know it's rot," he said savagely. "You're everything to me, more than the breath in my nostrils, Peter, hear me out for once. If only I could make you see. You know in spite of—what—what you said at the hospital, you've never really forgiven me."

"Oh!" I said blankly.

His jaw squared in that determined manner I knew so well. "I've just got to make you see it from my aspect. I'm going to speak straight to you for once, even if I shock you to death. Peter, you will listen?" A little note of pleading crept into his voice.

I nodded, and played with the pages of the book.

"Women don't understand a man's point of view, they can't, not your sort of woman, anyway. They are brought up in dreams, not realities; they live with their minds, not their bodies. That won't do for a man. His is the searching instinct, the imperative need to love; at least, for most of us. I may go on, Peter?"

I said nothing, so he went on.

"You don't understand why you cannot forgive, but I

will tell you. The social and the physical aspect of it are confused in your eyes; I doubt if you even realise love has this twofold aspect. You think it was almost a crime, don't you, but to my mind we are no worse than Dolly and Ralph. I loved you, and you me, and we are human. Peter," he hesitated, "I *may* go on?"

I still said nothing.

"I am not ashamed of that," he said defiantly. "I loved you then, I love you still. What does shame me" (his voice quivered a little) "is that I deserted you. I think that will sear my memory in heaven. That is my crime; in that I sinned against love and society alike, for both command that when you take a woman you keep her. That is what you have to forgive, if you ever do forgive me, Peter. It is not love I have to implant in you again, for love such as we had for each other cannot die; you love me still, but the weeds of distrust and bitterness choke it down; it is those I have been struggling to remove. It is hard, for faith once destroyed is a plant of slow growth. But, Peter, try to understand I am a man, not a hero or a saint. Even the hero may have been a coward once; I have learnt my lesson, and I would not fail you twice."

Bill turned in his sleep and yapped uneasily, but everything else was listening; half-involuntarily I rose, and he did too.

"I am a man, not a Galahad or a romantic boy." His eyes flashed, and he flung back his yellow head impatiently; he was the Viking once more. "I want you—you are my mate—I want you." His voice was like little knives cutting at the cold wrappings round my heart, their straining made me dizzy. "I didn't know it then, I thought ambition counted most, but I know now, I've known for a long time there's only one thing that matters in this whole wide world, and that is love. Peter," he stretched out his hands to me, "you love me—be my wife."

And then the hot tears that were choking me welled up to my eyes. "I do not love you," I cried passionately,

"I will not, I will not!" And I turned and ran away from him.

I have been crying on my bed for an hour, and my eyes were so red I could not go down to dinner. What is the matter with me? I thought I was so peaceful now, and settled. I have not cried since I left the hospital. Oh, I do wish Jasmine were here. But I know what she'd say, and I won't.

He is right. I haven't forgiven him. Fran told me I was vindictive, I remember. I suppose I am.

CHAPTER XXII

Proverbs

TOMMY and I and Foxy Bill went out on the rocks early this morning, I felt as if I must get away from the house, everything there seemed to choke me. I wanted the cold sea-wet air, and the slap and crashing of the waves against the granite boulders. How sweet is the tang of the spray that brushes your lips and the impatient heave of the great sea! I wonder how many centuries they have looked down upon it, secure in their granite coldness?

Rex told me, one day, I was like one of these boulders, and he was the sea falling back from me baffled and fuming. He said the waves never gave up the struggle nor would he; but he has—he has gone to town again, he went this morning. I did not see him, but Dolly told me. She said, "He is going to make arrangements to leave the State, he is going right away; and of course it will ruin his career," and her eyes simply stormed reproach at me, but she is growing too wise to say anything.

Well, I can't help it if he is, and I do think it selfish of him. We have grown such friends; I didn't realise till this minute that I shall miss him. Why, I shall, horribly. It seems dull out here this morning without him, even Tommy's chatter doesn't interest me. But—no, no, I can't marry him, I just can't. Oh, he might be satisfied to be friends. Men are selfish.

I can't help it if I can't love anyone else again. But I do like him ever so, he is so strong and gentle; and Tommy worships him, and—— What on earth is the matter with me? I couldn't feel worse if I had indigestion. Well, I don't care. there is a spell about him, and he is

always at my bidding, and I never have to ask him twice for a thing; and so patient too, for I give him nothing. There are not many men would treat me as he does. I shall miss him. I almost wish——

I think I'll play hide-and-seek with Tommy. No, I won't, I'll read Proverbs. I like the sonorous ring of the sentences. I read them aloud to the restless grumbling of the swell, and it makes them more impressive and convincing.

"Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all sins."

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

"As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear."

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

Perhaps that is what is wrong with Rex. Perhaps I hurt him yesterday. I did not mean to, but he disturbed me. He always can disturb me, can I never live down his power? But I am sorry if I was cruel again. Dolly told me he is coming down to bid us good-bye, I will say I am sorry—perhaps he will stay then.

Peter, attend to what you are reading.

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."

Oh, Proverb-preacher, how true that was—how many years ago? I remember I thought he was a god, and his eyes were the flame at which my soul lit itself. But my soul is dead. How soft his yellow hair was in the moonlight. And that night we rode home from Dick's. Can a girl ever forget her first kiss? Oh, why is he so big and splendid and loving, or why can't we wipe out the years and start all over again?

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."

" She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life.

" Her children arise up, and call her blessed ; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

" Favour is deceitful, and beauty vain ; but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised."

Could Rex ever feel that about me ? Oh ! he could not, and I should die if he ever thought of me lightly. If my children knew, how could they rise up and call me blessed ? No, I can never marry him, I could not bear it.

Peter, you are getting a perfect cry-baby ; if you don't stop you'll frighten Tommy. Here the wee imp comes scrambling down the rocks, Bill after him. What a patching is in store for me, from the looks of things ! Well, I don't care as long as he gets here with a whole neck. His method, when a rock is too high to jump from, consists in sliding down it. Still, that only damages his clothes.

What a bonnie boy he is ! I'll take him and Proverbs and Bill home to lunch. They've all done me good.

Let's call out good-bye to the sea, Tommy!

CHAPTER XXIII

Alone—and Afraid

ONLY two days since he left us ; it seems like two years. And every minute I grow more frightened and puzzled. What do I want ? I have been thinking and thinking until my brain reels round, and I cannot see my way clear. I'm groping in a mist. Does Rex mean so much to me still ? Is it because of him that I am out of sorts ? Tommy says it's Rex. At breakfast this morning his woes broke out.

"Rex needn't go away," he wailed, "it makes Peter humpy ; and she can't play Three Little Bears properly, she can't growl, and I want Rex." Tommy thinks he is too big to cry, but it was a hard fight then.

Dolly and Ralph never even smiled, though I felt myself colour under Tommy's reproachful eye. But as he rose Ralph said casually, "I suppose Dolly told you he's coming down to-day to say good-bye to us ?"

He gave a tiny shrug. "I am sorry ; he is a splendid fellow."

Of course they cannot understand.

I have no one to turn to. I think I will go and sit in the church ; no, I won't, I'll go on the rocks again. It is stormy and grey, and it fits my mood ; perhaps I will find my answer there.

Oh ! storm clouds and wind and lashing spray, soak through me, cool this fever in my brain, give me a sign.

It is all grey, and I am alone—and afraid.

CHAPTER XXIV

By Love Justified

I CAME home long after lunch, wet and tired and depressed. There was no answer for me in the storm. But I could not rest at home, and at last I thought again of the silent little church. I would go and sit there, and perhaps, as so often before, calm would come to my spirit.

The church was very dark, for it was a gloomy day ; the wind still shrieked outside, like an angry spirit hurling defiance at the house of God. The shadows seemed to move as if they were alive. At another time I would have been frightened, but to-day the presence of something else besides myself comforted me.

I felt so much alone. I flung myself down on the altar steps and stretched out my arms to Him, if He was there. I do not know how long I lay there like that, fighting with myself.

"God," I whispered at last, "God of all peoples and all creeds, show me what to do—give me a sign." And then I rose slowly to my feet, for Rex was beside me. We looked at each other in silence for a moment ; the last rays of the setting sun fought a sulphurous way through the clouds and lit up his face and the brass crucifix.

"They told me I would find you here," he said. "I have come to say good-bye."

I did not answer, I was thinking ; at least, I didn't think exactly, but things seemed to flash across my brain like sheet-lightning, I didn't understand quite what they meant.

And Rex was speaking again. "I've given it up, Peter, I see it's no use. I'm—beaten. And so I'm going away." The words came jerkily. "I can't stay near you. I'm going far enough away to never see or hear of you again, and by and by perhaps I'll forget you. If I only could! Yes, I know I'm not thinking of you, I'm selfish, selfish to the core; but, Peter, there are limits to a man's endurance, and I love you."

He paused a minute, but I would not meet his eyes.

"And so I've come to say good-bye."

"If you loved me," I said, "you would stay and be my friend."

"Friend!" He laughed harshly. "Good Heavens! you're talking to a man, not a china image, a man with red blood in his veins. Friend! Why, I love you—don't you know what that means?—love you as a man loves only one woman—love you with the blood of my soul and the heart of my being."

We neither of us raised our voices, it didn't seem possible in that silent calm, but somehow the harsh, tense whisper was more dreadful.

"Though I have raised a barrier between us that you will never let me cross, I love you; though I can ask for nothing, hope nothing. Peter!" he cried in sudden anguish of realisation, "you are mine, I will not give you up."

The last spasms of the dying day flowed in like blood over the shadowy benches and trickled down the crucifix. Rex drew my gaze to it.

"Peter, in front of that may I speak of the past again? For the last time?"

I caught my breath sharply and nodded.

"I loved you then, although I left you, and you know it. I never meant to marry you," he said, and his voice was hard, "I only wanted a diversion, and you were something outside my experience of women, which was not inconsiderable. I am frank, but I can't damage myself further with you now. But the play turned to

earnest. I began to care, and I stole your heart. That, in my eyes, is my crime ; but, before that sign of agony there, I never meant you the further harm you most condemn me for, and, Peter, as God is my witness, I believe when I came to my senses I would have gone back to you. Oh, Peter ! ” his voice vibrated like the low strings of a harp, “ can’t you trust me again ? ”

I felt hot lead running through my veins, and I clutched the altar rail to keep myself upright. Coming to life was a painful affair. The last streaks of day came through the stained robes of Mary and lit up the lines of pain round his mouth ; the shadows about seemed blacker by contrast. I felt as if we were only two souls floating in the dim, mysterious light.

“ Of course you couldn’t,” he said hopelessly, “ I shook your faith too rudely ; but, Peter, God knows, if you could forget the past, how I would strive to be the man you could help me to be. Peter, I love you so.” He laughed sadly. “ I’ve ruined your life, but, if it comforts you any, be sure I have ruined my own too, for the only life that means anything to me now would be linked with yours. God knows I must have made you suffer, but He knows too I’m paying for it now, for my hell is, and always will be, that my own cursed hands have crushed the only flower in the world for me. There’s no torture like a man knowing that he himself has slammed the gates of heaven in his own face, and that it is his own fault that the woman he loves must hate him, in life, and death, and after.”

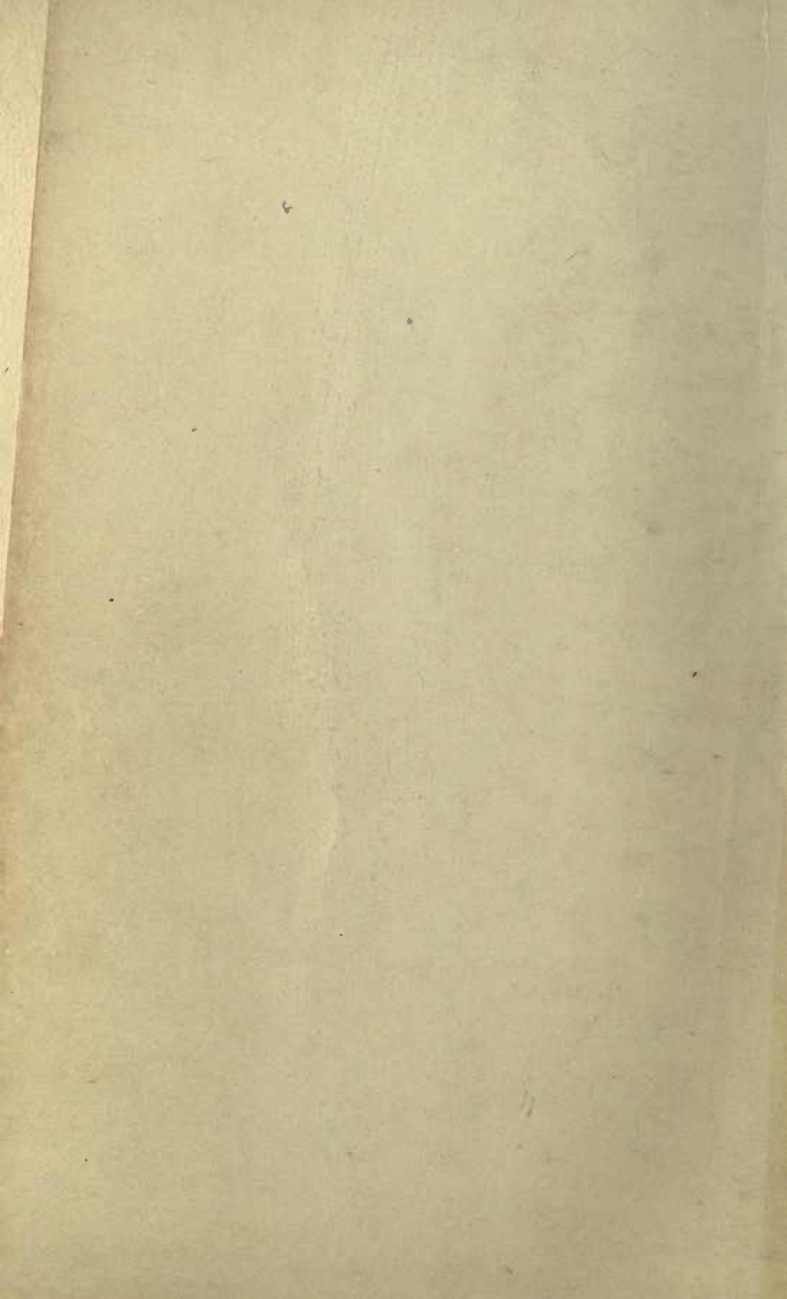
The shadows invaded the painted windows now, turning their blues and reds to tender grey ; the rain outside sounded like sobs. And as I looked at the fading head with its sad, yet smiling mouth I found my answer, and once again, as so long ago, the springtime blossomed in my heart. I knew that Rex was right ; for good or evil, right or wrong, I was his woman—his, unquestioningly, irrevocably, from the beginning of time throughout eternity : that father was right too ; hatred and bitterness

are only smarting pride, and love—true love—covereth all sins.

Father and Fran and the Proverb-writer, a queer medley, but they all knew the one big thing I didn't.

"God forgive me, Peter," he said with a break in his voice. "Good-bye."

I went to him with my hands outstretched, glad and unashamed, for by the love I bore him was I justified.



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